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DEAD-SHOT RALPH WAS SUDDENLY BROUGHT TO A HALT BY THE COMMAND:  
"HANDS UP, PARD!"

OR,  
**The Cowboy Smuggler Smash-up.**

A Romance of the Gold Ghouls of California.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

POINT DESOLATION.

A HIGH, rugged promontory, jutting out from the mainland in the shape of a horn, was the abiding place of a strange and mysterious people.

The point formed a safe harborage a mile back

from the sea, in a sheltered inlet, and half a league off-shore there was the protection of a ragged reef which seemed to break the inward rolling waves of the Pacific at low tide, and over which when in fury there was a wild surf that rolled in to split against the rocks or dash on up the inlet to a sandy beach.

The horn-like point of land was known as Point Desolation, and a strange community had made its home there for, as well as being seamen, its people were also ranchers, having cattle-ranges back among the plains and mountains.

Bold and expert sailors they were, as well as splendid riders and huntsmen.

Suspicion had fallen upon them as being wreckers and smugglers, but no proof had been found against them.

Numbering several hundred souls, they were under a chief beyond whose word and decision there was no appeal.

They had a fleet of stanch, swift boats with which they fished and ran cargoes to San Francisco and other points along the Pacific Coast.

At the time that Point Desolation is presented to the notice of the reader great excitement prevailed there.

Men, women and children stood upon the cliffs gazing seaward and down the coast, and conversing in earnest tones of some event that had happened.

The people, dressed in a picturesque costume—half-sailor, half-frontier dress, were a bold, hardy and intelligent set, women and children as well as men.

What had caused their excitement was the fact that one of their young men, a dashing, handsome fellow, skipper of one of the fleetest of their boats, and who stood at the head of the youths of the community, had become jealous of a new member of the settlement, and, his nature being warped thereby, had turned smuggler, had lost his vessel captured by a revenue cutter, and then, challenging his rival to a duel, had left him for dead, and escaped to sea with the chief's schooner and his own reckless crew.

His rival was a youth who had been wrecked upon the coast, and, adopted by Chief Karl Kenton, had become a favorite with all.

He had been left for dead by Marlo, his foe, though only stunned by the bullet, and had put to sea in another vessel, the Idle Wings, in chase of the fugitives in the chief's schooner, the Sea Pearl.

With him had gone Chief Kenton's pretty daughter Pearl, who had secreted herself on board to make the cruise in a spirit of adventure.

Coming back from the mountains, Captain Kenton had gone also in chase in the swift sloop, Racer, and thus the people of Desolation Point were watching and waiting for news, as the revenue cutter Rush had put into the harbor, in search of Marlo, the Cowboy Smuggler and his men, and learning the situation had also gone off in chase of the three vessels, the Sea Pearl, Idle Wings and Racer.

Standing upon the piazza of the chief's house, now and then raising a spyglass to her eye as she glanced down the coast, was a woman whom one would not have expected to find a dweller among such a people.

She was a woman who scarcely looked thirty, with a face of remarkable beauty and sweetness of expression.

She was dressed in black, wore a jaunty sailor hat and looked like one raised in refinement and luxury.

"I do hope the cutter will overhaul the fugitive smugglers before either Ralph or my husband does so, for I have my all at stake there, since Pearl ran off on the Sea Pearl, and a combat might take one of the three from me, and I have become as at-

tached to the youth as though he were my own son.

"How strange it was, too, that when the cutter came in here yesterday I should find in her command my own brother, whom I have not seen for fifteen long years!

"Well, I told him all, and that the man I married and whom both he and father believed was a murderer and a forger, was not the guilty one they deemed him, and I know brother Edgar well enough to feel that he will do all in his power to atone for the wrong done my noble husband.

"No sail in sight yet; and I long so for some news of the absent loved ones," and thus musing Valerie Kenton, the wife of Captain Karl Kenton the Coaster Chief, passed to and fro, ever and anon leveling her glass to catch a longed-for sight of a returning sail on the distant sea.

## CHAPTER II.

### A STRANGE MEETING.

A TRIM little steam vessel-of-war was bounding along southward, in full view of the California Coast, and with lookouts aloft and aloft eagerly scanning the waters far and wide, on the day following the scene at Point Desolation.

"Sail ho!"

The cry came from the foretop and there at once appeared on deck a handsome man of thirty-six dressed in the uniform of a captain in the United States Revenue Service, for the steamer was a cutter.

"Ay ay, my man, what do you make her out?" called out the officer as he leveled his glass forward.

"She is a sloop, sir, and crowding sail, bound southward and two leagues off shore," was the answer.

"Then she is the craft we are looking for," said the officer, and he ascended the mizzen rigging and once more leveled his glass.

"I see her now and we will catch her in a few hours, though she is running rapidly.

"The others must be leagues ahead of her, though," said the captain, and returning to the deck he ordered the chief engineer to get a couple more knots an hour out of the steamer.

The craft was a fine one, carrying one long gun mounted forward, and three twelve-pounders to a broadside, with a crew of seventy men.

The captain's cabin was commodious, luxuriously furnished and fitted up in a manner that indicated a refined taste and scholarly occupant, for there were books, works of art, a piano, guitar and other evidence that the commander intended to make his sea home comfortable in the extreme.

The cutter had lately destroyed a smuggler yacht, while the crew escaped, and it was discovered that it had been manned by Marlo and his crew, from Point Desolation, and who were known as the Cowboy Smugglers.

Visiting the Point in the hope of capturing Marlo and his men, Captain Edgar Yerger had discovered in the wife of the coaster chief his sister whom he had long mourned as dead.

From her he had learned that the Cowboy Smugglers, finding that they were to be taken by their own people, who had discovered their lawless acts, had cut out the chief's schooner, Sea Pearl, and put to sea, while Ralph Rollo, the captain of the captured craft, had followed in the Idle Wings, and the chief had gone also in pursuit in the next swiftest vessel.

With the extra speed added, the cutter Rush fairly flew over the waters and soon drew near enough to the sloop to see that she was being crowded with all the sail she could stand up under, and that her decks were crowded with men.

As the day wore on there was every prospect of an approaching storm, while, just

as the sloop was within hailing distance two other vessels were sighted far ahead.

There were the fugitive Cowboy Smugglers, and the pursuing Idle Wings under young Ralph Rollo, or Dead-Shot Ralph, the chief's adopted son, and yet swift as the steamer was going it would be impossible to come up with them before nightfall and then the threatening storm would surely break.

But the sloop, then ahead and near, Captain Yerger ordered to come to, and her skipper to board the Rush.

"Send him to my cabin, Mr. Wynn," he said to the officer of the deck.

The sloop was at once hailed by the officer.

"Ho the sloop, ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"What sloop is that?"

"The coaster Racer, from Point Desolation."

"Whither bound?"

"In chase of a smuggler, the leading schooner you see ahead, sir."

"Ay, ay; come to, and then come aboard the steamer."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the sloop swept up into the wind and lay to.

Then a surf-skiff was lowered from her decks into the sea, the man at the tiller sprung in, and seizing the oars, sent it rapidly toward the steamer.

He was a man of really noble and commanding presence, six feet in height, broad-shouldered, and as erect as a soldier.

He wore a sailor suit of blue, a gray slouch hat, top boots, and a belt of arms—a very picturesque costume.

He stepped on board the cutter with the air of a man who was dignified, courteous, but not humble, and as he raised his hat politely to the officer of the deck, he said, in a voice deep and rich in tone:

"Your captain would see me, sir.

"I am here."

"A splendid-looking fellow that," muttered the officer as he ushered the man into the cabin.

As he entered, Captain Yerger arose to meet him, and starting back, the Coaster Chief cried in surprise:

"My God! you are Edgar Yerger, the brother of my wife!"

"I am, Kent Carleton, and I knew that I was to meet you, and I offer you my hand. I have wronged you, and I ask your pardon for my acts in the past," said the cutter's captain earnestly.

The skipper of the coaster sloop had stood gazing upon the cutter's captain with a strange look in his face.

There stood Captain Edgar Yerger, with his hand extended, and the look of one who humiliated himself from a sense of duty.

At last the Coaster Chief spoke, and in a low tone, in which there was some surprise:

"Now, Captain Yerger, let me ask you how it is that you know that you have wronged me, that I am innocent save for what I have told you?"

"Because, Kent Carleton, I have seen my sister, whom I have so long mourned as dead."

"You have seen Valerie?" asked Captain Karl Kenton, as he was known to the people of Point Desolation.

"I have, for I put in there in search of the Cowboy Smuggler Marlo and his men.

"She sent for me, we met face to face, and she told me all, of your absolute innocence of forgery charges and other crimes, and that is why I hold forth my hand to you in friendship, and asking your forgiveness for my doubt of you."

"It is willingly granted, Edgar Yerger, and I shall appreciate your friendship, for I have always liked you, and in the face of apparent proof of my guilt, a dying man's confession, I could not censure you for doubting me.

"Let us be friends."

"Gladly," and the hands of the two men were clasped, after which Captain Karl said:

"But let me tell you that Marlo the Smugler is in the leading craft ahead, and my own daughter and adopted son in the schooner that is pursuing him, so there must be no desperate combat in which my child, or that noble boy may be killed, so I beg of you to press on in chase and capture Marlo yourself."

"I will do so, and your vessel can follow, while you go with me."

"And still as Captain Karl, the Coaster Chief."

"If so you wish it, yes," was the reply, and once more the cutter gave chase to over-haul the vessels far ahead.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE COWBOY SMUGGLERS.

THE vessel that had been leading those that were in pursuit was a very pretty craft of some forty tons' burden.

The craft carried at her peak a strange flag, for it was a red field in the center of which was a spur of gold.

Upon the deck of the schooner were some twenty men, and their dress was more that of cowboys than sailors.

They were all armed with a belt of revolvers and bowie-knife, and around the masts were their rifles.

The commander of this craft was a young man with a face full of reckless daring and stamped with dissipation, though he could not have been over twenty-one or two.

His brow was clouded now, and he had an anxious expression resting in his eyes.

The young captain would glance aloft at the vast quantities of sail he was carrying, and then down upon the sea, to end with a look at the heavens.

Then his gaze would be cast astern where he beheld a schooner in chase and about a couple of miles distant.

Far astern of this vessel he saw a smoke from a steamer and a tiny white speck indicating another sailing craft.

"Sawyer, I don't half like the looks of the skies, for I believe we are going to have a very nasty night of it," said the young skipper, addressing one of his crew who was near him.

"It will be the better for us?"

"Perhaps, if yonder smoke is not the cutter Rush in pursuit also of us."

"You fear it may be, Captain Marlo?"

"Well, I can see no other reason for a steamer being in this locality; but how is it that Ralph Rollo, curse him, has managed to gain on us with the Idle Wings, when the Sea Pearl could also walk away from her in any weather?"

"Ralph has set sails we never thought of, as you have seen, Marlo, and then too he is the best sailor I ever saw hold a tiller."

"I must admit that, much as I hate him, but how it was that my bullet did not kill him in that duel I cannot understand. I certainly supposed he was dead."

"Had there been a bullet in his pistol though he would have killed you, Marlo."

"Yes, for he is a dead shot; but I knew better than to face him with a bullet in his pistol—See, the Idle Wings still gains on us."

"She does indeed, but the storm will strike us before she comes nearer—ah! see there, Marlo, they have those guns taken from the wrecked barque Rainbow on board, for my glass reveals them distinctly."

Marlo hastily glanced through the glass and cried:

"By Heaven, but you are right, Sawyer, and glad am I indeed that this storm is coming up, for those guns would bring us to terms and no mistake, or cause us to run

ashore, wreck the Sea Pearl and take to the land for safety."

"You are right, Marlo, for we could not fight them off with the advantage the guns would give them."

"No, we could not, so pray for the storm, for that boy Ralph Rollo is not to be easily eluded or beaten off—but is not that a woman on board?"

"It is Pearl Kenton as I live."

"Then her father is there too."

"No, he could not have gotten off so soon in the Sea Pearl, though I suspect that he is in that craft far in her wake."

So the two talked together for some time longer, when the smuggler captain began to regard the gathering clouds more attentively and his face to deepen with anxiety as he saw that the sea and sky were putting on a very angry look.

At last Marlo felt that he dared carry sail no longer; darkness was coming on, the storm was about to burst in all its fury, and the words were upon his lips to take in canvas when down from the black, trailing clouds came a stroke of lightning and the mainmast was riven in twain as the bolt descended upon it with deadly and appalling effect.

The crew grouped together about the mast fell dead in their tracks, the helmsman was struck down, and Marlo was hurled to the deck with stunning force.

When he arose a few moments after his vessel was a wreck, his crew lying dead about him, and Sawyer and one other seemed to be all there were alive, while the flames were bursting forth to consume the craft, and the storm was howling down upon them.

"Quick, the life-boat! It is our only chance for life," cried the Cowboy Smuggler, and he and his two men sprung to the boat, lowered it from its davits and springing into it went shoreward borne upon the foaming waters driven before the storm.

### CHAPTER IV.

#### CAST ASHORE.

MARLO the smuggler leader had realized, the moment that he regained his senses, that there was but one means of escape for himself and his comrades who had not been stricken down by the lightning's stroke.

He saw that the Sea Pearl was dismantled, and that she was doomed to burn up within a short while, the flames fanned into fury by the gale.

His eyes fell upon the life-boat and it would certainly be safer in the storm than would the wrecked vessel.

He gave a glance at his crew, but they lay as motionless as though no spark of life remained in them.

Sawyer and one other seemed to have survived with himself.

"Now, men," he cried, as he seized the tiller, while the others each took an oar.

The gale was driving them shoreward, and they had all noticed that the coast was a sandy beach.

The life-boat would live in any sea they knew, if they could cling to it, and they braced themselves for the struggle before them.

Higher and higher leaped the flames upon the little schooner, and its blazing canvas and spars lighted up the sea all about it.

But the darkness and sea shut out all other sights, their pursuer not being seen anywhere.

"I only wish he has gone to the bottom, muttered Marlo between his clinched teeth.

They could not see the shore, and so drove on in the darkness not knowing what was before them.

On, on they went, the waves at times breaking over and filling the life-boat, which, however, shook them off and rode on as bravely as before.

At length they dashed into a chaotic mass of water and Marlo cried in warning tones:

"Ho, men, were are in the surf."

"Cling to the life-boat for your lives!"

But as he spoke a large wave rolled landward, the life-boat was lifted upon its crest and it was tossed bodily up into the air and fell bottom upward.

There was a wild shriek from despairing lips and the boat went surging landward, only one of its occupants clinging to it.

That one was the man Marlo and he clung with a grip which death only could shake off.

On through the breakers the life boat was hurled and Marlo still clung to it.

At last it touched the bottom and was then dashed upon the sands shattered to atoms.

Marlo had sprung forward the moment it touched, and struggling, swimming, fighting off death he had made his way out upon the beach and staggering beyond the reach of the waters had dropped down upon the sands completely exhausted.

He had lain there for a long while before he could gain strength to creep away.

Then he had gone back to the line of woodland, and taking a flask from his pocket had placed it to his lips for a long pull at the contents.

This had seemed to revive him, and making a bed among the leaves he had lain down to almost instantly fall asleep.

When he awoke the sun was shining, the storm had blown away and though the surf still fell heavily upon the shore the sea had lost its terrors for him.

There upon the beach lay the charred hull, all that remained of the Sea Pearl, and here and there were scattered the bodies of his crew burned beyond all recognition.

Neither Sawyer or the other man in the life-boat were to be found, and Marlo felt that he alone had survived the wreck.

Off-shore he saw the schooner Idle Wings lying to, and a boat was coming ashore from her.

Then, too, further off lay the steamer which he had been observing the day before and another craft which he recognized as one of the coaster fleet.

"It is the Racer," he muttered to himself.

"Yes, they are coming ashore from the Idle Wings to count the dead and see if any one survived the lightning stroke."

"Well, I am the sole survivor, I believe, cast ashore here without food and no help near; but it is far better than to be in their power, for then would I be strung up to the yard-arm."

"Yes, that is the cutter Rush, and she went to Point Desolation after me and my men and fortunate was I to escape when I did."

"Yes, the boat is landing, and that is Ralph Rollo."

"Oh! that I could kill him, for I hate him as I do Satan himself."

"If they come this way I must be ready to take to flight, for I will not be taken."

"No, not I, and I will not die, either, not I, for I will live for a cruel revenge upon that boy."

He watched the boat's crew go from body to body and gather them up.

Then graves were dug on the sandy shore, back beyond the reach of the waters, and the charred remains of the dead smugglers were decently buried.

Then the crew returned to the boat, and it put back to the Idle Wings, which at once stood away down toward the cutter Rush and the sloop Racer.

From his hiding-place the wrecked man watched the Idle Wings run down near the cutter, and a boat put off for her.

After the three vessels had remained for some time near each other, the fugitive saw them start on a run northward.

Raising his clinched fist he shook it after the vessels, while he cried:

"One of these days, Ralph Rollo, we will meet again, and then will I demand full satisfaction for all my sufferings at your hands."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE WRECKED MARINER.

THE man who had escaped capture by the wreck of his vessel from the lightning's stroke, stood gazing after the retreating vessels as they sailed back up the coast until they had disappeared from his view.

Night was not far away, the winds off the sea were chill, his clothes were still damp and he had no food.

"I am in a very dangerous situation, that is certain.

"Bruised, wet, hungry and wretched, the sole survivor of my crew, cast upon a desolate shore and with no help near.

"But, surely I have not escaped all that I have to die here now, no, indeed, it cannot be.

"But I have this left, my best, my only friend," and with this he unbuckled his belt and poured out upon the ground a lot of gold twenty-dollar pieces.

"I was a fool not to search the bodies of my shipmates as they came ashore, for they all had money, and the men under Ralph Rollo got it.

"But if I stand here and talk to myself, bemoaning my misfortunes, I will never get help, so I must go and seek it."

So saying he cast another long look over the sea.

"Good-by, old ocean, a last farewell, say I to you, for I guess we part company forever.

"Yes, I have no craft, no crew, and the age is too far advanced for a man to make gold from lawless deeds upon your bosom, broad as it is.

"Now I shall stick to the shore, shall seek gold amid the mountains and upon the broad prairies, for gold I must have, as I was not born to be a pauper.

"Farewell, old sea," and he kissed his hand in a dramatic manner to the ocean, raised his hat in salute and then turned his back and walked away.

He moved on and after a short walk came into a trail that led from the shore back toward the mountains.

And on he went until the shadows deepened and he had to halt as he could no longer follow the trail.

Looking about him for a place of refuge for the night he saw rising before him a wall, and which he had at first taken for a cliff of rock, seen through the foliage.

As he neared it he said:

"One of the old Spanish Missions, as I live.

"I will sleep here and begin afresh in the morning, though I begin to feel faint for want of food."

He entered the old ruined chapel and crawling upon some rocks laid down to sleep.

Worn out as he was he sunk into a dreamless sleep which lasted until a ray of sunlight peered through the foliage and shone into his face.

He awoke with a start and started to arise when he found that he was stiff and sore from head to foot.

He was just forcing himself to sit up, in spite of pain, when a horseman rode into the Mission and glancing about said angrily:

"She is not yet here."

The wrecked mariner was shielded from view by his position, but could see the horseman distinctly.

At first he was about to call out, but hearing the man's words and seeing his face he hesitated.

As he did so the clatter of approaching hoofs fell upon the ears of both, for the horseman said in an eager tone:

"She is coming now."

The man was superbly mounted, the trappings of his saddle and bridle being lavishly adorned with silver, while he was dressed in the suit of a Mexican courtier.

Under his broad-brimmed sombrero was revealed a very dark, handsome face, but with a look of evil in his eyes.

As the wrecked mariner looked from his place of concealment a horse and rider dashed into the old Mission.

The rider was a young girl, with a wealth of red-gold hair and large lustrous dark eyes, while the other features were perfect, all forming a very beautiful face.

Her form was exquisite, robed in a habit that fitted it closely, and was embroidered in silver thread.

A sombrero and black plume was upon her head, resting jauntily upon one side.

"Ah! you have come at last, sweet Senorita Lulita," said the horseman, bending low in his saddle.

"Yes, Senor Marco Fuentes, I have come to show that I was not afraid to meet you in this lone Mission, and also to say to you again, and for the last time, that you can never win my love, that our friendship ends here, this day, forever.

"Now, Senor Fuentes, you have the answer which you told me you would exact from me here to-day, and I bid you *adios*."

As she spoke she started to wheel her horse, when, quick as a flash, a lariat held by the horseman was cast over the head of the animal she rode, dragging him back on his haunches.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE RESCUE.

THE maiden had not observed the lasso held by Senor Fuentes, and neither had the wrecked smuggler done so.

It was therefore a surprise to both of them when the spirited horse ridden by Senorita Lulita Samos was suddenly reined back upon his haunches, and was thus prevented from flight.

"Ho, Senor Fuentes, this is your game, is it?" cried the young girl, and she wheeled her horse directly toward the man now, while she continued:

"I am prepared for your treachery, so unrein my horse or die!" and the beautiful girl leveled her pistol at the head of the Mexican horseman.

But the man was not in the slightest degree awed by the act, for he laughed lightly and replied:

"I have a spy in your household, Senorita Lulita, and your pistol is not loaded, so I have no cause to fear your deadly aim."

She raised the weapon quickly, saw the truth of what he said, and asked, with no comment upon the fact:

"Well, you desire to make terms with me, I see?"

"I do."

"What are they?"

"I have loved you since the day I first saw you, and I ask you to become my wife, Lulita?"

"You have told me that before, and asked the same thing a number of times, always receiving the same answer that I give you now, that I do not love you, that I will never become your wife."

"And yet you owe me your life?"

"Ah! that is the basis you put it on is it?"

"For argument's sake I will say yes."

"Well, you did rescue me from a band of cut-throats I admit, and hence you deserve a reward, more than being invited to our home and being made welcome there as a friend.

"People have said that your ranch was a blind, that you were a gambler and much more that is bad; but my father liked you,

as I supposed, and so allowed you to be often our guest.

"Now I know that he owes you large sums of money, that he is in your power from his gambling debts, and yet when you demanded that he cancel the debt by giving you my hand in marriage he drove you from his house.

"This shows that he did not care for you.

"I received your demand, for your note was nothing more, to meet you here to save my father from ruin worse than death.

"I have come, and I have given you my answer.

"Now, you hold me captive as it were, and if you demand pay for saving me from the outlaw band I am willing to pay you out of my own fortune, which you have discovered is independent of my father's riches.

"Name your price?"

"Your hand in marriage."

"Further talk is useless then, for let me tell you, Senor Fuentes, that I would rather die than become your wife."

"Then let me tell you how deeply you are in my power, girl, for I am chief of the outlaw band who captured you, and I planned that seeming rescue upon my part.

"I am determined you shall become my wife, or I destroy your father within twenty-four hours, and will force you to wed me secretly and defy you to bring me to punishment.

"What do you say now, girl?"

"That I believe you capable of being what you claim, doing all that you say you will."

"And you will go to Padre Jose with me and let him make you my wife?"

"No, I will die before I will so degrade myself, so do your worst, Marco Fuentes."

"Well, I shall take you to the retreat of my outlaw band, and there hold you captive until you have changed your mind.

"Come, you must go with me, for my men are within call to enforce my command. I will call them."

But as he uttered the words, and placed a whistle to his lips to give a call, there came a whirring sound and a large stone struck him fairly in the breast and he fell like a dead man from his saddle.

At the same moment Lulita Samos saw a form climbing down from a pile of rocks, and heard the words:

"Don't be alarmed, senorita, for I will befriend you."

It was Marlo the Cowboy Smuggler, and at sight of him, the maiden uttered a cry of joy.

Marlo walked with seeming difficulty, and said:

"I am a shipwrecked mariner, senorita, who took refuge here for the night, and heard all that passed between you and that man.

"I am suffering, half starved and hardly able to move, but I will defend you with my life."

"No, no, you seem scarcely able to move, and that signal, cut off as it was by your blow, will bring this man's band to his aid.

"Come, mount his horse and we will fly for our lives!

"I will aid you to mount, for, poor senor, you seem very ill."

She slipped from her saddle as she spoke, led the horse of the outlaw leader to a pile of rocks, and, as Marlo was really suffering greatly, aided him to the saddle.

Then she released the lasso from the neck of her horse, and said, as she leaped lightly into her own saddle:

"I hear them coming, senor, so it is a ride for life for both of us.

"Come, follow me!" and the young girl dashed out of the old ruined Mission followed by Marlo the Cowboy Smuggler upon the horse of the fallen outlaw leader.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE FIGHT.

As the young girl dashed out of the old Mission, with Marlo the fugitive smuggler riding close behind her, mounted upon the splendid horse of the chief of outlaws, there came into view a dozen horsemen riding rapidly toward them.

They were coming up a valley and about a couple of hundred yards distant.

They saw the maiden, then the horse and rider following, but at first appeared to mistake the latter for their chief, as they drew rein.

A second glance however showed them their mistake and one called out in Spanish: "Halt there! halt!"

But the fugitives did not halt, only Lulita Samos urged her horse the faster and called to Marlo to do the same.

With this, the horsemen gave a wild yell and rode rapidly forward.

They halted an instant as they reached the entrance to the old Mission and beholding their leader uttered wild cries of anger and excitement.

Then, while several dashed into the ruin, to the aid of their chief, the others pressed on the more rapidly in an endeavor to overtake the fugitives.

At first it seemed to Marlo as though the movement of the horse was breaking every bone in his body, so racked was he by pain, and he almost decided that he could go no further but would drop from the saddle and meet the outlaws, accepting whatever fate was in store for him.

As he became warmed up from his ride the pain grew less intense and soon he felt that he could readily bear with what he had to endure for hours longer.

The outlaw band was well mounted, and they urged their horses to full speed, so that they gained upon the fugitives for awhile.

As she saw however that the outlaws were creeping up too close she said:

"We must increase our pace, for they are getting within pistol range."

"Yes, senorita, it is well not to let them get near enough to cripple our horses."

"Now when we get over that ridge, we will let our horses out at full speed."

The horses responded willingly and well to the urging and when the outlaws came again in sight had gained on them all of a hundred feet.

When the pursuers had supposed the fugitives were doing their best before, and now beheld how they were being dropped behind, they at once opened fire, and their aim was at the legs of the horses, to cripple them.

The bullets fell thick about them, and one clipped the flank of the horse ridden by Marlo, while another cut into his shoulder.

He reeled, but held on, while Lulita cried:

"Oh, senor, you are hit!"

"But slightly, and in my present conditions the bleeding will help me," he coolly replied.

Their horses were now at full speed, and fleet animals both of them, and possessing great endurance they very rapidly went ahead beyond pistol range.

Seeing this the outlaws drew rein, and then Lulita said:

"They have given up the chase, but we will press on just as rapidly, for I am anxious to know what that wound of yours amounts to."

"It is but slight, senorita, I am sure."

"I think you have suffered enough, senor; but rest and help lie before you, and a most cordial welcome awaits you at our hacienda."

"Had those men come on they knew they would have to face our people of the ranch, and that they did not wish."

"Do you think you killed Marco Fuentes, senor?" suddenly asked Lulita.

"I knocked the breath from his body and the fall stunned him, that is all, I fear."

"You have rendered me a service, senor, and words can never thank you for it, but never will I forget it, I assure you."

"I was fortunate to be near to serve you, senorita, and I can almost now feel glad that my yacht was wrecked, though I can but feel deeply that I was the sole survivor."

"We were struck by lightning in the storm, my yacht took fire and was driven ashore."

"That is my story, senorita."

"Well, senor, I am glad to welcome you to my home, for there it lies, and there comes my father to meet us," and she pointed to a gentleman riding toward them and mounted upon a mule handsomely caparisoned.

He had just ridden out of the gateway of a walled-in hacienda that was now visible in the midst of a luxuriant growth of trees half a mile away.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## AN HONORED GUEST.

THE Hacienda Samos was an old structure that dated back over a hundred years.

Senor Samos's grandfather had written "Don" before his name, and was a famous Spanish naval officer.

The owner of the hacienda, at the time of Marlo's coming was Enrique Samos, and he had, with what had been bequeathed him by his forefathers, works of art, paintings, a large library and elegant furniture, with a stable full of carriages and horses.

His acres were numbered by the tens of thousands, his house was very large, extending over several acres, with its piazzas, plazas and wings, while the finest of gardens was near at hand.

The cellar was filled with rare old wine, costly silver service was upon the tables and a host of servants stood ready to obey the slightest wish of the master and his beautiful daughter.

Then there were extensive outbuildings, large herds of cattle, hundreds of horses and every indication that the master was a man of vast wealth.

Senor Samos had traveled much in the Eastern States and in foreign lands, and he had met and loved a girl who dwelt in far away Boston, and who returning that love had become his wife.

She had died when their little daughter, Lulita, was but a few years old, and from that day, when he laid his loved wife away in the grave beyond the hill among the orange groves, the Senor Samos had made the child the idol of his life.

Dwelling some leagues away from the Hacienda Samos was a young man who had purchased a ruined house and a few cattle.

He was a handsome, intelligent fellow, calling himself a Mexican, though he spoke English without an accent, and looked far more like an American.

Still he had money and soon became popular in the very extended settlement in which he had sought his home.

One day he had rescued Lulita Samos from a band of outlaws, and from that time became an honored guest with her father.

The outlaws, it was said, had sought to kidnap her, and unless the ransom they demanded, which was enormous, was paid, they would put her to death.

The maiden treated her rescuer kindly, and the daring he had displayed in single-handed attacking a dozen desperate men was the talk of the haciendas for a hundred miles around.

Lulita herself asserted that under her rescuer's deadly aim she had seen four outlaws bite the dust, but when a force went to the scene they found the band gone, and their dead had been carried with them, while their trail had been most skillfully covered up, so as pursuit was useless.

The hero of Lulita's rescue at once fell desperately in love with her, and he was a very frequent visitor at the Samos hacienda.

The Senor Samos was fond of a game of cards, and often until dawn the two men were wont to play for large stakes.

At last Senor Marco Fuentes told of his love for Lulita, and begged her to become his wife.

She kindly but firmly refused.

And so it went on, these frequent confessions of love, and firm refusal, until at last the man received his decided dismissal from the young girl.

He kept away for several weeks, and then wrote her a note, asking her to meet him at the old Mission, and it would be the last favor he would ask of her.

He stated in it that it would save her father from ruin worse than death.

The result of that meeting the reader has seen, and the man who came forward to meet Lulita and the wrecked mariner was Senor Samos.

He was a fine-looking man of forty-six or eight, his dark hair just beginning to thread with silver.

He looked with some surprise at Marlo, mounted upon the horse he knew to belong to Senor Fuentes, but greeted his daughter pleasantly with the remark:

"Why, my child, I did not know that you were away from the hacienda until I saw you coming over the hill and rode to meet you."

"You have ridden hard I see, and I am to have the pleasure of welcoming a stranger."

"Yes, father, a stranger whose name even I do not know, but who has saved me from a fate worse than death, and he is ill and suffering, while he also has been wounded," said Lulita earnestly.

Senor Samos turned pale at her words, but extended his hand to Marlo and answered quickly:

"Senor, you are more than welcome, and I can see that you are ill, suffering, so come with me to my home where you shall have every care."

"I thank you, senor, for I am in great pain I must admit; but permit me to introduce myself as Julius Marlowe, a gentleman yachtsman who was wrecked on your coast, and who, in seeking a refuge, met your daughter."

"No explanations now, my dear senor, for yonder is a place of refuge and you shall be our most honored guest," said Senor Samos and they rode rapidly on to the hacienda where the wrecked smuggler soon found himself in the most charming of rooms, and every kindness showered upon him.

## CHAPTER IX.

## HOMEWARD BOUND.

THE scene changes from the Samos Hacienda back to the Pacific Ocean.

The little schooner *Idle Wings*, which had pressed on after the smuggler and seen him go to his doom, had afterward, when the day dawned and the storm had blown over been signaled to come near the cutter, which the young skipper afterward boarded along with his fair young "mate," as he called Pearl Kenton, who had hidden on board to get a chance to be in at the capture of Marlo the Smuggler.

After a stay of some time on board the cutter, where a strange scene occurred in the cabin when Pearl was told that its commander, Captain Edgar Yerger, was her mother's brother, the *Idle Wings* spread all sail for the return to Point Desolation, the *Racer* following in her wake.

The helm was in the hands of the young skipper, and seated near him was Pearl Kenton.

The youth who commanded the destiny of the pretty schooner was scarcely over seventeen though he appeared to be older.

His fair companion was a maiden on the verge of fifteen and a little beauty.

Her dress was picturesque and richly embroidered, she wore a sombrero with a plume in it, and her face indicated strength of character and intelligence beyond her years.

As the daughter of the chief, Captain Karl Kenton, she was known as the "Pearl of the Sea" and the "Mountain Pearl," for she could ride a horse, shoot a rifle or revolver, throw a lasso and follow a trail as well as she could sail a boat, and she was an expert in doing that.

Half of the year she passed at the ranch of her father up in the mountains, and when there was wont to ride, herd cattle, hunt, shoot and enjoy herself as much as she could with outdoor sports.

The time she passed at the sea, at the cabin home of her parents, was devoted to a sea life, for she would go cruising with her father in his schooner, visit San Francisco and thoroughly enjoy the life of a sailor.

Such was Pearl Kenton when she is presented to the reader upon the deck of the *Idle Wings*, when returning from the chase after Marlo the Smuggler in her father's schooner the *Sea Pearl*, named after her, and which she had seen go to its destruction upon the coast.

Ralph Rollo was her adopted brother, and had been since the vessel on which he had been a sailor had been dismasted in a hurricane and then driven ashore upon the reef off Point Desolation.

Then had Pearl Kenton, with a crew she had secretly gathered to risk the danger, run out in the *Sea Pearl* to the rescue of those upon the wrecked barque, which was rapidly going to pieces.

Urged by Pearl, whom he idolized, Marlo had made the attempt but had failed, where the young girl had been successful.

Ralph Rollo had sprung from the wreck with a line about his waist, had reached the little schooner, a rope had been drawn on board and thus many had been saved.

From that night Ralph Rollo and Pearl had been devoted to each other, and the boy sailor, with no home, no country, no place of refuge as he had said, willingly cast his lot with the dwellers at Point Desolation.

He had been adopted by Captain and Mrs. Kenton as their own son, and never had he given them cause to regret the kindness thus shown him.

And from that night of his failure to rescue the crew of the wrecked barque, had dated the intense hatred of the young sailor Marlo for Ralph, and his determination to get rid of him.

From the moment that he looked upon Ralph as a rival, Marlo had been a changed being, his whole nature seeming to undergo a change.

He had begun to go down hill, and he plotted the destruction of Ralph his rival, until in the end his own destruction came, for he turned to smuggling, and became an outlaw.

## CHAPTER X.

### A HAUNTING FEAR.

THE *Idle Wings* went smoothly on her way over the moonlit waters, so lately lashed into fury by the tempest.

With his hand upon the tiller Ralph guided her skillfully, while Pearl sat near him enjoying the beauty of the scene.

"Do you really think, Ralph, that Marlo is dead?"

"I do not well see how he could have escaped death, Pearl."

"You think the lightning killed them all?"

"It must have done so, for the two masts were shivered to kindlingwood, and the deck was splintered too."

"Then the schooner burned to the deck?"

"She burned here and there, Pearl, but the splash of the waves put out the fire, and then the hull went ashore, as you know."

"Yes, and you said the bodies were burned badly?"

"Yes, beyond recognition."

"How many?"

"I found three on the hull, so caught that they could not wash off, and sixteen upon the shore."

"Nineteen?"

"Yes."

"And how many had Marlo aboard with him?"

"Just that number, I believe."

"I thought there were more."

"I think not."

"Well, somehow I cannot get rid of the thought that Marlo is yet alive."

"I should always fear him, since he has proven so wicked."

"He would never dare come to the settlement again, Pearl."

"Not openly, no; but I fear he would do so secretly."

"Then you fear him so much?"

"Not for myself, Ralph."

"Why, then?"

"For you."

"Why, I had no thought of that."

"But he will never forgive you."

"Granted, but I do not care."

"His duel with you, when he forced Berkley to put no bullet in your pistol, shows what he can be guilty of."

"Had I known your dread in this matter, when I was ashore burying the dead, I would have been more particular to identify each of the bodies that I saw, so as to convince you that Marlo was among them."

"But the task was a terrible one, charred as they were, and I was anxious to get it over with."

"You did but right, Ralph, and I will try and dismiss the feeling I have, though it seems to have taken possession of me and I fear we will hear of Marlo the Smuggler again."

"Don't think so, Pearl, for I am equally as sure that we will not."

"But now tell me what do you think of finding your uncle as you have?"

"I hardly know what to think, Ralph."

"You are glad to have found him?"

"Oh, yes, for he appears to be a fine man and I like him greatly."

"I have the same opinion of him, that he is a manly fellow, Pearl, and I like him."

"I have often thought, Ralph, that father had some secret motive of living at Point Desolation."

"You see my parents have educated me, and that gave me the power to think for myself."

"I have seen that my parents are different from all that we come in contact with at the Point, that they are educated, refined and like the great people I have read of."

"Seeing this I have wondered all to my self how it was that father and mother dwelt among those who were not their equals, and seemed to shun the outside world."

"I have seen mother weeping at times, when she thought no one saw her, and I have noted the look of sad resignation upon her lovely face."

"Then I have seen that in father's eyes that told me he had a secret he wished to hide, and I have known at times that he suffered sorrow."

"You are a close observer, Pearl."

"Oh, yes, I suppose I am, Ralph, for I know that Marlo was not born to the life he leads."

"I have always felt that some of our people kidnapped him when he was a boy, and never dared take him back to get the ransom which had doubtless influenced them to take him from his home."

"He never remembered much of his home, or appeared not to, and so grew up, I am

told, with old Mother Magic, the Witch, the only one to care for him."

"Well, I have thought too, Pearl, that Marlo did not come of the lower classes; but whatever he came from he certainly had a great deal of evil in his nature."

"Yes, he had a bad heart; but, Ralph?"

"Yes, Pearl."

"Do you know I have my own idea about you too?"

"About me, Pearl?"

"Yes, I believe you too have a secret you have well guarded; I believe you are not what you appear."

"Why Pearl?"

"I mean it."

"Then, Pearl, I will tell you my secret."

## CHAPTER XI.

### RALPH'S STORY.

"Do you mean it, Ralph?"

The tone of Pearl as she asked the question was one of surprise as well as doubt.

For two years the youth had been at Point Desolation settlement, and certainly in that time, claiming him as her brother, the young girl had become well acquainted with him.

He owed to her his life, he always sought her aid and advice, and he had seemed never to keep anything from her and from her parents.

In answer to the young girl's question he answered with a smile:

"Of course I mean to tell you, Pearl, and you shall be the judge of whether I acted right or wrong."

"When am I to hear your story?"

"Now."

"I am all attention, Ralph."

"Well, little sister, I do not know who my parents were, but I presume they were English, as I was found off the coast of England, though I have often wished that I was an American born."

"So do I."

"I was picked up, I am told, by an army officer dwelling upon the coast, and who was retired, and well-to-do, kept his yacht."

"He found me in an open boat, at sea, and took me home, adopting me as his son, though he was a bachelor."

"He had a pleasant, comfortable home, and did all he could for me, though he was a stern, selfish and unlovable man."

"His housekeeper managed me, or thought she did, and I had first a governess and then a tutor."

"I had horses at my disposal, and learned to drive, ride and fox hunt."

"There was an old fisherman upon the coast whom I looked up to as a great man."

"He taught me a great deal about the sea and boats, and I regarded him as my best friend."

"Well, some miles from where I lived was a grand old house, the former owner of which had been murdered, with his wife and several of the servants, while the house had been robbed of a large sum in gold."

"They never found the murderers, and the old place was left to go to ruin, and was called haunted."

"There was a missing heir to it, so they said, and until he was found the place was allowed to go to decay."

"Well, one night Old Ben, the fisherman, dared me to go to this place, Harcourt Hall, and remain there until midnight, all alone."

"I was to go by day, take a piece of chalk with me, and draw a mark upon the floor of each room, to show that I had gone all over the house."

"Then I was to go into the library, await there until night came on, where I was to remain until I heard the village clock strike twelve."

"Then I was to light a candle, and leaving the house was to go home, while he at dawn was to go there and see if I had done as I said I would, and if the candle was still

burning, which it would be if I had not lighted it before midnight.

"Well, Pearl, I went, leaving my horse in a clump of evergreens, and I walked from room to room leaving my chalk-mark.

"When I reached the parlor I glanced from the window and saw two horsemen coming.

"They were Sir Gurney Gladden, a wild, dissipated young man, and his gamekeeper, Barney.

"I had had trouble with both of them, when Barney sought to punish me for hunting near Sir Gurney's grounds, and I did not wish them to see me there, so hid from them."

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE RUNAWAY.

"I DID not know what had brought those two men, Sir Gurney and the gamekeeper, to the Haunted Hall, as it was called.

"Knowing that they had threatened to catch me some day and lay their whips upon my shoulders I had an idea that they had come after me, having seen me go there."

"I had been hunting, so had my shot-gun with me, so of course felt able to protect myself.

"They entered the house, then came into the parlor where I was and began to talk together.

"I discovered that Old Ben, the man I believed my friend, was a traitor to me, for he had sent them there to kill me."

"Why, Ralph?"

"It is true, for they had some motive for getting rid of me and deliberately plotted my murder.

"At last, just as it was growing twilight, Sir Gurney approached the alcove to look out and see if he could see me coming, while Barney was at a front window.

"He saw me and started back, while he at once called to the gamekeeper to come and kill me.

"Well, Pearl, I knew that they wanted to kill me, and so I leveled my shot-gun at Sir Gurney and warned him off.

"I had to fire in self-defense and Sir Gurney fell dead.

"Barney, the gamekeeper, sought to prevent my going and I fired the other barrel at him and he fell also.

"I left the house then, mounted my horse and rode home at full speed.

"The captain was away, so I went to my room, packed my traps, got what money I had saved up and fled.

"I feared that I would be pursued, captured and hung for murder.

"So I was frightened into flight, and now, as it has made a man of me I am not sorry that I left, though of course the cloud hangs over me go where I may, Pearl."

"But no one knows that you killed them, Ralph?" said Pearl in a sympathetic way.

"Oh, yes, for I wrote a note to the captain telling him all, and left it on his table for him. Then I went to sea, was wrecked, and was picked up by a vessel bound for China.

"And thus I wandered about until good fortune put me on the barque Rainbow."

"Now you know my secret, little sister."

"Yes, and will keep it; but is there no more to tell?"

"Yes, there is something more to say and that is, that it is time for you to turn in, for loss of sleep will dim your pretty eyes, Pearl."

"When you awake I guess I can show you Point Desolation—good-night, little sister."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE RETURN.

THE words of Ralph were fulfilled, for when Pearl came on deck in the morning, the little cabin having been given up to her

exclusive use, after it was found that she had come on board the Idle Wings to be in the chase after the smuggler, the distant point of land looming up ahead was recognized by her at once as "home."

Astern of the Idle Wings a league came the Racer, which Captain Karl was in command of, and that the two vessels might run into port together, Ralph shortened sail.

The Racer began to overhaul the Idle Wings then, and the two passed through the break in the reef not a cable's length apart, and came up the inlet abeam.

Upon the point were seen the coasters, men, women and children, and flags were flying to welcome back the two pursuers of the Cowboy Smugglers, though it was supposed, the Sea Pearl not being along, that the fugitives had escaped them.

The little fleet was also decorated with flags as the vessels lay at anchor in the harbor, and Ralph answered the salutes with two shots from his guns on board the Idle Wings.

The first boat ashore carried Pearl and Ralph, who went by the Racer and took off the chief.

At the landing Mrs. Kenton stood, and she greeted Pearl with mild reproach for running off on the chase.

"I could not help it, mother, indeed I could not, for I tried ever so hard. Forgive me."

"Well, Pearl, I will forgive you; but you made me very anxious about you."

"Now, husband, tell me of the smugglers."

"They are at the bottom of the sea."

"Ah! you overtook them then?"

"No, though Ralph well-nigh did so, and saw them go to their doom, for it was Heaven that punished Marlo and his men, as the Sea Pearl was struck by lightning, then hurled ashore in the storm that struck us."

"A just punishment, Karl; but are you sure that no one escaped?"

"Ralph feels certain that all met their death by the stroke of lightning, and were then thrown ashore."

"Did he see Marlo?"

"I believe so, for he buried the bodies, and so reported to Captain Yerger."

"Ah! you saw Edgar then?"

"Yes, and he told me of his visit here, and now knows the truth about me."

"Somehow I believe that Marlo is yet alive."

"Why, Valerie?"

"I cannot help it, for that man was surely not born to die as he did."

"Marlo is a bold, bad man, one who tried to murder Ralph."

"I believe that Marlo yet lives," said Mrs. Kenton emphatically just as they reached their cabin, the husband and wife having walked up together from the shore.

"And I believe the same, mother," said Pearl, who overheard the remark.

"It is hard for me to believe, for I saw the bodies washed ashore and buried them," remarked Ralph, who had walked ahead with Pearl.

"Well, should he be alive, which I cannot believe, we have nothing to fear from him," Captain Karl said.

"Let me change the subject, Karl: what change in our lives will the meeting of my brother make?"

"I do not wish to change our lives as they now are, at least for the present, Valerie, for remember, your brother has got to place the proofs of what he wishes to have the court undo before I care to be known as other than I now am, Karl Kenton the Coaster Chief."

"These people have been good and true, faithful to us, and the acts of Marlo and his men have brought distress and suspicion upon them, so I do not wish to desert them until all goes well again."

"And I agree with you wholly, Karl, and

we will while here better their condition all in our power."

"Yes, and begin at once, and place them more in communication with the world; so Ralph, I have a mission for you to perform?"

"Yes, sir, I am ready."

"It is to go to San Francisco, and, if you cannot find a craft to match the lost Sea Pearl, have one built that will do so, for I must have a good vessel, one that shall be as before, the Pearl of the fleet, and I leave it to you to get such a craft."

"I'll do my best, sir."

"I know that you will, and in the mean time we will run up to the mountains for a few months," said the Coaster Chief.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE GOLD GHOULS.

THE stone which was hurled from the night retreat of Marlo the Smuggler, in spite of his weakness and suffering, was well aimed, as has been seen.

It was so severe that it knocked the breath out of him and dropped him from his saddle as though a bullet had passed through his heart.

When he returned to consciousness his men were bending over him.

"Are you killed, captain?" asked a rough looking fellow in a tone meant to be kind.

The injured man arose to a sitting posture and looked about him upon the eight or nine men gathered there.

"Who hit me?" he asked with an effort.

"A hard-looking customer, senor, whom we saw ride away on your horse with the young lady."

"Where is he?"

"Antonio and some of the boys went on after him, senor, while we saw you lying here and came to your aid."

"He took my horse?"

"Yes, senor; but where did the bullet enter?"

"I was not shot."

"I heard a sound, just caught a glance of a stone, and it struck me fairly in the breast."

"Yes, senor, but let me see how badly you are hurt."

The shirt was opened and there was visible a cut and bruise larger than a man's hand.

"I don't think any bones are broken, senor, but it was a mighty hard blow."

"We must not remain here, as all of old Samos's cowboys will be down upon us."

"Where shall we go, senor?"

"Take me near the ranch, and you men go to the retreat."

"But, senor, will not the Senor Samos come there after you, for he will know from the senorita that you are not what you have appeared?"

"Do you think Antonio will capture the man and girl?"

"I fear not, senor; but we will soon know."

"Then I will await here for Antonio's return, and see if he captures them."

"If not, Senor Captain?"

"I shall go to my ranch and brave it out."

"It will be dangerous, senor."

"I will take all chances, for I do not care what the girl says, I will deny it."

"But there will be the one, senor, who wounded you."

"Ah! true, he must have overheard."

"He surely did, senor."

"Who is he?"

"None of us knew him, senor."

"Well, I'll have it out with him, too, and go to my ranch."

"Suppose they come in force, senor?"

"Well, you can go from here to the retreat, and I will take your horse, Sanchez, and go to my ranch."

"To-night you can all leave the retreat, and come one by one to my ranch, where I

will have a hiding-place for you, and if they come to take me they will find that I have those near to protect me."

"That will be well, señor; but if Antonio has the girl and your assailant?"

"Then we will all go to the retreat and I ask no favor of any man, for our fortune is made, and the Gold Ghouls, as they call us, Sanchez, will have struck it rich, yes we will no longer need haunt the trails and risk life to get our fortunes," and the chief of the Gold Ghouls seemed elated over his prospects.

The band were a lot of outlaws, acknowledging as their chief a man who had the name of being an honest ranchero, but secretly was a spy and laid traps into which he led the unfortunate travelers who carried gold or jewels about with them; committing murder when resistance to their demands was made.

Thus they had come to be known as the Gold Ghouls, and though no shadow of suspicion had ever fallen on Marco Fuentes as being connected with the outlaw band, he had boldly confessed to Lulita Samos that he was their chief, and Marlo from his hiding-place had overheard this conversation.

"Yet, in the face of his assertion, the daring man intended to return to his home and have it out.

After a wait of some little time Antonio and the others who had found Lulita and Marco, were reported coming back.

Dashing into the old ruin, Antonio called out:

"I am glad to see you safe, Señor Captain, for I feared you had been killed or seriously wounded."

"No, I am hurt, but not seriously; but they escaped you, Antonio?"

"They did, señor, in spite of all I could do."

"Then I will mount the horse of Sanchez, while you go with the men to the retreat, and to-night, single, come to my ranch."

"Be off, for old Samos and his cowboys will soon be upon your trail," and ten minutes later the Gold Ghouls had parted from their chief.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE SMUGGLERS' PRISONER.

"SEÑOR JULIUS MARLOWE," as Marlo the Smuggler was pleased to be called, found himself in most luxurious quarters at the Hacienda Samos.

A priest, who was a physician, had been sent for, and soon came to administer to his sufferings, while a servant was placed at his beck and call.

Marlo had said nothing to Señor Samos regarding the affair in the old ruined Mission, and was surprised, as he lay in his room, to have his servant bring him a note.

He quickly read it, and it was as follows:

"SEÑOR MARLOWE:—

"For reasons I cannot now make known to you, but will at some future time, I beg of you not to tell my father the name of the man from whose power you rescued me, or even to describe him.

"You may say that I told you that it was the band known as the Gold Ghouls who had me in their power.

"Do this for me and oblige forever,

"Yours gratefully,

"LULITA SAMOS."

Marlowe smiled as he read this letter over.

He smiled the more as he read it over and over again, and at last muttered:

"A secret between us; well, that is a good beginning.

"Well, she is very beautiful, very lovely, and very rich, I take it.

"I have fallen into a bed of clover, and I will make the best of it, for I came well recommended by having served the girl so well and hence her father.

"Marlo, you may find it to your interest to turn honest and become a gentleman," and the man laughed as though he enjoyed the situation immensely.

With wine, food and his wounds and his bruises dressed, he sunk to sleep, and when he awoke it was late in the afternoon.

He felt so much refreshed that he sat up and ate his dinner, and later was joined by Señor Samos in a glass of rare old wine, and then the ranchero said:

"My daughter tells me that in her morning gallop, she was captured by the Gold Ghouls, an outlaw band that infest our trails, sometimes raiding our ranches, and that you rescued her, though your weapons were useless."

"I was wrecked in my yacht, señor, upon your coast, and I alone survived."

Then followed an account of his night's adventure on shore, rescue of the ranchman's daughter, and pursuit by the Gold Ghouls.

"Señor Marlowe, I owe you more than words can express, for my child is the one idol of my life," replied the ranchman.

"Some time ago she was saved from those same Gold Ghouls by a neighboring ranchero, Señor Marco Fuentes, and it seems they have marked my child for their prey, knowing that I would give my entire fortune for her release."

"Why do you not hunt these outlaws down, Señor Samos?"

"We have tried to do so time and again, but they have eluded us."

"I would like to see what I can do to rid the country of them."

"You, señor?"

"Oh, yes, for I have served as an officer on the frontier, and being ashore now for an indefinite time, would be pleased to undertake the work, if I could get the aid I need."

"I have a score of cowboys, señor, brave as lions and who know the country well, who are at your service."

"Then I shall take the trail as soon as I am able, for I am fond of adventure and believe that I can meet with success."

"Señor Marlowe, you are a friend indeed, and may command me as you deem fit," was the remark of Señor Samos.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### LULITA'S SECRET.

THE next day Marlo was well able to join Señor Samos and Lulita at dinner, and the meal was a sumptuous one and most enjoyable to all three.

And after dinner while Señor Samos rode out over the ranch, the maiden led their guest to an arbor in the flower garden.

"I brought you here, señor, to explain my note to you," she said in an embarrassed way.

"No need to explain, señorita, for your word is law, and my pleasure to do as you you request."

"But I desire to explain, señor, and to ask your advice and aid."

"Both are at your command, señorita."

"Well, señor, to begin, I will tell you that Señor Fuentes is a comparative stranger, dwelling upon an old ranch he purchased some fifteen miles from here.

"He rescued me, as all supposed, soon after his coming to our vicinity, from the Gold Ghouls who had captured me, and he boldly dashed in upon them, killing several as I then believed."

"Unfortunately I could not return the love he offered me, and so he sought to entrap me and did so.

"I believe that you overheard what passed between us in the old Mission?"

"All, señorita, and your splendid nerve won my warmest admiration."

"Thank you, señor.

"Then, overhearing what you did, you are aware that Señor Fuentes is the secret leader of the Gold Ghouls, that his pretended rescue of me was a plot, and the men who fell were unhurt."

"He has won large sums of money from my father, who is greatly distressed at his losses, for he fears that Fuentes will make the giving of my hand the means of canceling the debt, and he is aware that I do not like him."

"I can well understand the situation, señorita."

"Now one of our men who was over at the Fuentes Ranch, told me the other evening, that Señor Fuentes had returned to his home, and stated that his horse had fallen upon were, injuring him severely."

"I feared that my father had recognized the horse, and so told him you had found the animal astray, which accords with the story which the cowboy also told Señor Samos as well as myself."

"Now I know that his boldly going to his ranch means that he intends to defy me, assured that I dare not tell my father, or doing so that he dare not act against him, in his power as he is."

"It would seem so, señorita."

"Now, señor, my father is a man of undoubted courage, and did he know of the insult to me, his indebtedness to Fuentes would not restrain him from going at once to him and demanding satisfaction."

"So I fear, señorita."

"Fuentes is a dead shot, and a perfect hand with rapiers, and my father's death would be the result of such a meeting, and that is why I wrote you asking you to keep the secret."

"I will do so, señorita, and more, I will be glad to arrange this matter in my own way."

"It was my fortune to serve you, and I have told your father that I am anxious to hunt down this band of Gold Ghouls."

"I shall plot first, and act when I am ready to strike a death-blow."

"Devoid of my beard, I make a fair looking priest, if I don the robes, and the gown will enable me to hide my weapons."

"I speak Spanish, as you may have observed, as I do English, and I shall, thus disguised as a priest, seek the ranch of this man Fuentes, feign illness, and ask shelter for a few days."

"He is a Catholic beyond doubt and will not refuse a padre of his church."

"You are a strange man, Señor Marlowe."

"One whom I think you will some day understand better, señorita," was the low reply, and the eyes of the young girl dropped under his ardent gaze.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE OUTLAW CAPTAIN AT HOME.

THE bold leader of the Gold Ghouls was as good as his word to his men, for when he parted with them at the old Mission, while they went to their secret retreat, he took the trail to his ranch.

He had half a dozen cowboys, a couple of servants, a Mexican and his wife, a hundred head of horses and a small herd of cattle.

When he arrived at his home, on the afternoon of the day of his attack on Lulita Samos, he was suffering considerably from the blow of the stone hurled at him.

He dismounted with difficulty and was glad to lie down and have his Mexican servant apply soothing bandages to his bruised and cut breast.

"Any bones broke, Juan?" he asked anxiously.

"I think not, señor; but the blow was a very severe one, and had the stone struck higher up would have killed you," answered the Mexican.

"Well, do all you can for me, Juan, for I must get out of this soon."

"Yes, señor, in a few days."

"See that the secret quarters in the old chapel wing are put in order, for the men will be here to-night to remain for a week or more."

"Yes, senor, all will be ready for them."

"And have El Cinto prepare extra food for them."

"Yes, senor, she will; but how many will be here?"

"A dozen."

"Yes, senor."

"And you be on the watch for them, so as to put their horses out with the ranch herd, and let them take their saddles and bridles with them."

"I understand, senor."

Having finished dressing his master's hurt, the Mexican called his wife to bring his dinner, and then he was left to rest for the remainder of the day.

After nightfall the woman, El Cinto, appeared with his supper, and found him feeling easier.

She looked to the bandages with gentle hand, and at his request sat down and sung for him, accompanying herself on the guitar.

She then rose and left with a soft good-night, and the man dropped off to sleep.

When he awoke it was daylight and Juan stood by his side.

"How does the senor feel?"

"Much better, though I still have pain."

"That will pass away under my treatment, senor."

"Did the men come last night?"

"Yes, senor."

"They came singly?"

"Yes, senor."

"And are in the east quarters?"

"As you ordered, captain."

"Well, put one of my cowboys at the ranch on the watch, and let him report the coming of any one, for I may have visitors."

"I will, senor, and while I have gone after him El Cinto will give you your breakfast."

Juan disappeared and the woman soon after came in with a tempting meal which the outlaw ate with considerable relish.

He had just finished his breakfast when Juan entered and reported that one of the cowboys had been placed on watch and would report the coming of any one.

Thus the day passed, and the next and no one came.

But upon the third day the cowboy signaled that some one was approaching the ranch.

Juan went forth to meet the visitor and reported that a good padre, who was ill, begged shelter and rest for a few days.

"Bring him in, Juan, for his presence here will be in my favor," was the reply, and soon after Padre Angelos entered the presence of the rancho.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### PADRE ANGELOS.

THE man who entered the presence of the outlaw rancho was one whom no one would suspect of not being what he represented himself.

He was in the garb of a Mexican padre, his face was clean shaven and he had the look of one who devoted his life to good deeds.

But he appeared to be suffering, and quickly dropped into a chair as he entered the room with the remark:

"Pardon, my son, but I am ill."

"The blessing of Heaven be upon your home, and may you be rewarded for the shelter you give me."

"Do not speak of it, my good padre, for I am ever glad to extend hospitality, especially to one of your cloth."

"But you look ill and must suffer, so Juan will take you to your room, which is not far from my own, just across the corridor."

"Thank you, my son, and you, too, look ill."

"Are you suffering from fever?"

"No, padre, I had a heavy fall from my horse, that is all; but no bones are broken and Juan and his wife are bringing me around all right as they will you, so command them for all you need."

"Thanks, my son, and Heaven reward you," and with this the worthy padre followed Juan to the room assigned to him.

It was near that of Fuentes, as he had said, and it was a very comfortably fitted up chamber, while both Juan and El Cinto did all in their power to make it cheerful and add to the comfort of the visitor.

He laid down for rest, but was able to sit up and eat a very good supper some hours after, to the seeming delight of El Cinto.

Then he walked in to see how his host was and paid him quite a long visit, after which he retired to his room, asking not to be called until late the next morning as the long rest would benefit him greatly.

But had his host known that the padre did not retire, but concealed himself in a recess of the dark corridor and watched there, he would have been anxious about his visitor's intentions.

While waiting there a man passed along the corridor bearing a dark lantern.

The Padre Angelos, as he called himself, at once followed him with noiseless tread.

He saw the man stop at what appeared to be a solid wall, and leaning against it at a certain place it slowly turned on a pivot and he entered.

The secret opening thus disclosed turned back into place again and the padre retreated to his recess and waited in the darkness with the patience of an Indian.

In a short while he saw the glimmer of a light at the end of the long passageway and the man bearing the lantern reappeared and was not alone.

He was accompanied by one wearing boots and in a cowboy dress.

The man bearing the lantern the padre now saw was Juan.

They passed the padre's door on tiptoe and entered that leading into the rooms of the outlaw rancho.

At once the padre stepped to the door, slowly opened it and stood in a curtained alcove.

He had observed this curtained alcove when in the outlaw's room, and that the door leading into the corridor opened without the slightest sound, so he took advantage of his discovery.

Upon either side of the alcove hung curtains, falling over closets in which Senor Fuentes kept his clothing.

Behind one of these curtains the padre took up his position and listened.

The bed on which Fuentes lay was not twenty feet from him, and he heard the words:

"Send Carlos here, Juan, and return in an hour to escort Sanchez back to his quarters, for he would never find the way there in this old rookery, splendid trailer though he is."

"Yes, senor," answered Juan and he left the room.

"Well, Sanchez, no one has come from old Samos's hacienda yet to capture me, so you and your men have not been called upon," said Fuentes.

"We are ready when we are called upon, senor."

"I know that, Sanchez; but the girl has not dared tell her father that I was the one who sought to kidnap her."

"It must be so, senor."

"I have just sent for Carlos the cowboy, for I dispatched him in disguise to the Samos Hacienda and he has returned half an hour ago and El Cinto is giving him his supper."

"He went to see what he could find out, Senor Captain?"

"Yes, and I wish you to hear what he has to say."

"The truth is, Sanchez, I wish to know who that man was who gave me the blow I am now suffering from, and thus thwarted my well-laid plan to get the senorita into my power."

"Yes, Senor Captain, I will be glad to know myself who he is, and if he is still at the Samos Hacienda," answered Sanchez.

"That is what Carlos was to find out—ah! here he is now," and as the Outlaw Rancho spoke Cowboy Carlos entered the room.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A GOOD LISTENER.

THE man who entered the room was a tall, slenderly formed man with thin, dark face and piercing eyes.

"Well, Carlos, I am glad to see you back, and I hope you have news," said the rancho.

The cowboy replied in a sharp, decided tone:

"I have all the news I could get, senor."

"You went to the Samos Hacienda?"

"Oh, yes, captain."

"You saw Anita, your sweetheart?"

"Yes, senor, but she is too devoted to the Senorita Lulita to get anything out of her."

"I believe she would give me up to-day to go with the senorita."

"But you got what news you could from her?"

"Oh, yes, senor, Anita told me that her mistress had been attacked by the Gold Ghouls, and but for her rescue by a wrecked sailor, who had slept all night in the old Mission, the outlaw chief would have kidnapped her."

"A wrecked sailor, Carlos?"

"Did you see him?"

"No, senor."

"Did Anita describe him?"

"She said he was a very handsome young man and brave as a lion, and if the senorita did not fall in love with him she was greatly mistaken."

"I shall have something to say there, I think; but tell me how the young man was treated?"

"With lavish hospitality, senor."

"And he is to remain there?"

"No, senor, he left at dawn this morning."

"Ah! and where did he go?"

"He was to go to San Diego, Anita said, senor."

"Then the Senorita Lulita did not tell her father that it was I who attempted to kidnap her?"

"It seems not, senor, for Anita said it was the Gold Ghouls."

"Well, Carlos, I wish you to go to the coast, near the old Mission, and see if there are any signs of a wreck there."

"I will start at dawn, Senor Captain."

"Return as soon as you and make your report."

"Yes, captain."

Carlos then took his leave, and the outlaw rancho turned to his lieutenant and asked:

"You heard all, Sanchez?"

"Yes, captain."

"What do you think?"

"That you were right, senor, that the senorita dared not tell her father it was you who attempted to kidnap her."

"Yes, there are reasons why she dare not tell which you do not know, Sanchez."

"But if she does not tell, then I am in no danger of a visit from her father, at the head of a score of his herders, and so I can allow you to return to the retreat to-night."

"We are a little crowded, senor, it is true, but then you had best be sure, and wait until to-morrow night, for then Carlos will have

returned from the coast, and perhaps can give you some information about the wreck."

"I believe you are right, Sanchez, so you can remain here in hiding with your men until to-morrow night."

"Then I shall make a demand upon the Senorita Lulita, and if she refuses, her father must compel her to become the Senora Fuentes."

"Should she refuse still, senor?"

"Then her father is a ruined man, Sanchez, for I hold his notes for sums amounting to nearly all he is worth, and the senorita is rich enough to make her marry me by foul means if she will not by fair, and to do so, we must make a captive of her."

"Yes, senor, once in your power, you can bring her to terms."

"So I believe."

"But you must, upon your return to the retreat, hold your men in readiness to obey my bidding at an instant's notice, as I may need you."

"I will be ready, senor, never fear."

"Well, I will see you to-morrow night before you depart with your men, and hope to give you more news."

"Now here comes Juan, and he will escort you back to your quarters."

The man then left with Juan, who entered with his lantern, and as they disappeared in the corridor, Padre Angelos came out of his hiding-place with the muttered words:

"I am a very good listener, I think."

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE PADRE ACTS.

It may have been the wind from the opening of the secret door, but whatever it was it caused the door through which the padre was escaping from his secret hiding-place to slip from his hand and go to with a bang.

"Who is there?" cried the outlaw ranchero, sternly, and at once came the answer in gentle tones:

"Do not be alarmed, my son, for it is I, Padre Angelos."

"Ah! padre, I supposed you were asleep."

"I could not sleep, my son, and so rose to seek you, and see if you were still awake, that I might talk to you."

"I saw two men going up the corridor, but did not call to them."

"Do I disturb you, my son?"

"Oh, no, padre. I am glad to have you with me."

"Sit there in that easy-chair."

The padre obeyed and began to talk upon different subjects until Juan returned, and seemed surprised at beholding him there.

"I could not court slumber to my eyelids, my son, so come to keep the senor company, yet fear I disturb him."

"No, indeed, padre, and I beg you to remain as long as you wish," quickly said the outlaw ranchero, while Juan set to work and dressed his master's injury for the night.

Then Juan took his leave, and soon after the padre said that he was growing drowsy, and would return to his room.

He did so, and as he threw himself upon his bed, said:

"Now I can sleep, for there is no need of further watching to-night."

"To-morrow night Sanchez and his men go, and then I will have the ranchero at my mercy, just where I wish him to be."

It was bright sunlight when the padre arose, and Juan was there to help him, and look after his wants.

The ranchero, Juan said, was still unable to leave his bed, but he hoped he would be all right in a few days.

The padre ate a hearty breakfast, expressed himself as feeling rested and much improved, and told Juan that upon the morrow he would be able to go on his way.

"The senor hopes you will remain much

longer, padre, and we all are glad to have a holy man in the hacienda," said Juan.

"Thanks, my son, but my duties call me away, far to the northward."

After his breakfast the padre strolled about the hacienda and the grounds, and seemed most deeply interested in all that he saw.

Juan served as his guide and gave him a general insight into the place and its history, as he had heard it.

At dinner the padre dined in the dining-room and El Cinto served him and was exceedingly attentive.

As night came on the padre paid a visit to the Senor Fuentes and had his supper in the room of his host.

He took his leave early to go to bed, and retired to his room where he knelt down by the door his ear to the key-hole, listening to every sound heard without.

"There he goes now to fetch them," he muttered, and soon after he heard the steps of a number of men going back along the corridor.

"It is the outlaw band leaving the hacienda."

"When Juan has gone then it will be my chance to act."

He waited for a long while, showing remarkable patience, and at last opened his door softly.

He crept along the corridor to the door of the ranchero and listened.

All was silent within.

"They have gone," he muttered.

Yet still he did not touch the door.

At last he decided to act and knocked lightly.

"Who is there?"

It was the voice of the outlaw ranchero who asked the question.

"Padre Angelos, my son."

"Come in, padre."

Thus invited, the padre entered.

As on the night previous he took the easy chair, drawing it nearer to the bed.

"How are you feeling to-night, my son?"

"Much easier, my good padre."

"I am glad, for you will be able to be out in a few days."

"Oh, yes, I am now, I suppose, only I do not wish to take any chances."

"You are right, my son."

"But may I ask you just how you were hurt?"

"My horse fell with me, throwing me upon a rock, which struck me here."

"I see, and it was a bad fall."

"Yes, padre."

"Well, my son, do you see this?"

As the padre spoke he took from beneath his gown a revolver and leveled it full in the face of the ranchero, who lay flat upon his back.

"It is a revolver, padre," said the ranchero.

"It certainly is, my son, and loaded and cocked, while the muzzle covers your heart, and the weapon is held in the hand of as desperate a man as you ever met."

"Do you understand, Marco Fuentes, that a cry, a whisper, a movement to resist will be the signal for me to pull trigger and kill you?"

The low words of the padre were spoken with deadly earnestness, and the prostrate man saw that he was in the power of one who meant all that he said.

His first thought was that the priest had gone mad from fever.

But then there came across him a sudden thought and he said in a voice of amazement:

"Great God! you are no priest!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE RANCHERO AND THE PRIEST.

At the words of the ranchero, lying flat upon his back, and wholly at his mercy, the padre said:

"You think I am no priest?"

"I know it."

"Then be most careful if you feel that you are dealing with a wolf in sheep's clothing."

"That is what you are."

"Granted."

"Who are you?"

"Padre Angelos."

"What do you want here?"

"I came to visit you."

"You do not know me."

"Far better than you suppose."

"Well, what is your business with me?"

"Just this, open your mouth!"

"I will—"

"Silence and obey!"

The ranchero did obey, and quickly the padre thrust a gag over it.

"Now hold up your hands, clasped together."

"I will—"

"Obey!"

"I—"

"Obey or die!"

The ranchero did obey, and quickly upon the wrists were snapped irons.

The ranchero groaned, and the padre said:

"Now I will adjust that gag, so that there will be no outcry."

He drew the gag down over the mouth until it was thrust into it, then made the straps fast back of the head.

"You can hear if you cannot resist or cry out, and let me tell you just this, that I will kill you if you utter a word while Carlos is here, for he just arrived."

"I will talk to him, and you are to pretend to be asleep."

"Now disobey and you settle your fate."

The padre quickly drew the cover over the man up to his mouth, and taking a seat in the easy-chair, picked up a book.

"See, here comes Carlos, so do as I tell you."

A moment after into the room stepped Carlos, just returned from a long ride.

"Ah, my son, do not speak aloud, for the senor sleeps, after a day of suffering, and he asked me to take your report when you returned, only speak in a whisper."

Carlos obeyed without a thought that anything was wrong, and said:

"I went to the coast, father, please tell the senor when he awakes, and found there the hull of a small but pretty craft, which had been partially burned."

"She had been stripped of all of value in the cabin, and back upon the shore among the pines were nineteen newly-made graves."

"I could find no trace of any one connected with the vessel, other than the graves, and a trail led from the coast to the old Mission, a trail of a man on foot."

"There was nothing of value about the wreck, sir, and so I returned to report to the senor."

"All right, my son, you have done well; but the senor wishes you to go to-night after the men who just left under Sanchez."

"I met them some miles back, father."

"Yes, but go after them, keep on with them to the retreat, and to-morrow night bring them back with you."

"Yes, senor."

"Juan will be here to look after them, the senor said."

"Now get your supper and a fresh horse, my son, and then depart, for so said the senor."

"Yes, father," and with a low bow Carlos departed upon his errand.

"Now, senor, as you are safe for awhile, I will leave you and go for a little visit to Juan, for I reconnoitered the place well to-day and know just where to find him."

A smothered groan came from the ranchero, but unheeding it the padre left the room, locked the door behind him and going across the Plaza knocked at a door of a wing of the

hacienda, and where a light shone in the window.

"Come in," said a voice and in the padre stepped.

Juan was there, seated at a table eating a late supper, and a bottle of wine was before him.

The cowboy had gone to his own quarters to get his supper with his comrades, and to exchange his horse for a fresh one.

Cinto was present waiting upon her husband.

"Ah, holy father! I beg pardon, for I thought it was one of the cowboys," cried Juan.

"No, Juan, it is I, and I have come to have a talk with you and with your wife."

"Yes, padre, I am glad," and Juan placed a chair for the padre and then said hesitatingly

"If I might make so bold, holy father, to offer you a glass of wine?"

"Not now, Juan, for I wish you to listen well to what I have to say."

"Yes, padre."

"You are not a man that cares to hang for your crimes, I feel certain."

"Oh *Madre de Dios!*" cried the man in terror.

"Now I happen to know just what you are, and also the Senor Fuentes, and I wish to save you from dying at the rope-end, so I have come to tell you that you had better do as I advise."

"I will, padre, I will, Heaven bless you!"

"Well, your master is going with me to-night on an errand he dare not put off longer, and I wish you to go and saddle two horses for us, two of the best, and bring them to the door of the senor's room."

"Then do you tell the cowboys in the morning that the senor has gone to the retreat, and when the men come to-morrow night from there, led by Carlos, do you put them in the secret quarters and await our return."

"Do you understand, Juan?"

"Yes, senor."

"Then go and obey my bidding, and when I come back to-morrow night I will see that you escape the fate that threatens you, that of being hanged."

"I obey, holy father, I obey," and the man quickly left the room, the padre not remaining, but going out also, and crossing to the door that opened into the apartment of Marco Fuentes.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A MIDNIGHT RIDE.

JUAN was terribly frightened at what the padre had said to him.

He did not understand it all, did not pretend to, or seek to; but he knew that the crimes of his life richly deserved punishment, and so he sought to do the bidding of one who promised to save him.

He went quickly to where the Senor Fuentes's horses were kept, for immediate use, and saddled and bridled two of the best.

These he led to the Plaza, where he was met by the padre.

"You said nothing to the cowboys, Juan?"

"Not a word, padre."

"You have done well, for when I have promised to save your life I do not pledge myself to protect others, so keep to yourself what I have said."

"Yes, father; but you will save my wife?"

"I will see that no war is made upon a woman, Juan."

"Ah, thanks, holy father, many thanks."

"Now keep your tongue between your teeth, and to-morrow night put the men in the secret quarters when they come and say that the captain will return later."

"Then await our coming in your own quarters."

"I will, padre, I will."

"Then go there now."

Juan obeyed with alacrity, and the padre taking the key from his pocket unlocked the door leading into Marco Fuentes's rooms.

There lay the outlaw ranchero as he had left him, and going up to the bed the padre said:

"You are to dress and come with me, senor."

The man could not but obey, and aided by the padre he was soon dressed and ready for the ride they were to take.

"You have some notes here of the Senor Samos, so I will see where they are."

The ranchero groaned and for a moment seemed about to spring upon the padre.

But the latter divining his intention said quickly:

"Don't do it, senor, for I will kill you, and am your superior in strength if it came to a test."

The ranchero stamped his foot savagely and saw the padre unlock his desk and hastily look over the papers to be found there.

"Ah! these are just what I wished, and as I see the figures they represent they do indeed call for a large fortune."

"There is gold here too, yes, quite a snug little sum, and as you will not need it I will just take it in my keeping, for I see there are several thousand dollars, a sum well worth looking after."

"Now, senor, we will ride, for we have quite a journey before us, if I remember aright."

The padre led the way to the door, and Fuentes drew back as he saw the horses.

"I will aid you to mount, senor, as your hands are ironed."

But Fuentes still hesitated.

"Come, I will stand no nonsense, and I do not intend to lift you, so mount or you will feel the point of my knife to encourage you on."

Thus urged, the outlaw ranchero mounted with the padre's aid, and springing lightly into his saddle the latter led the way from the hacienda.

He hesitated after leaving until he got his bearings, and then said:

"Yes, this is the trail that leads to the Samos Hacienda."

He saw the start the outlaw gave at his words and said:

"Yes, we go to the home of Senor Samos."

"It is a midnight ride, but we will get there by dawn, and I am sure that the senor will make us welcome."

"When we are well on the trail, out of hearing of your cowboys, I will take that gag from your mouth for I know how unpleasant it must be."

After a ride of a mile the padre halted and removed the gag from the mouth of his prisoner.

Fuentes gave a sigh of relief, and as soon as he could regain his speech he said:

"Now tell me, man, what all this means?"

"I will tell you all when I bring you before the Senor Samos."

"Do you mean to do that?"

"Yes."

"He is my friend."

"He was."

"He is now."

"He will not be when he learns that you are a card-sharp, and cheated him out of his fortune, thus securing from him the notes he gave you, representing about his entire fortune."

"Who are you, man?"

"One that knows you as you are, a card-sharp, an outlaw, a leader of the Gold Ghouls."

"It is false."

"It is true, for they have been concealed in your hacienda for several nights past, awaiting an attack from Senor Samos, did his daughter tell her father who was her intended kidnapper."

"You are the outlaw leader that has defied detection for so long, robbed the coaches and travelers, raided ranches and concealed your acts of crime most skillfully."

"You sought to force Senorita Samos into a marriage with you, to get her fortune, and you would have used your power over her father to make him urge that she should be your wife."

"Discovering that she hated you, then you determined to kidnap her, hoping to bring her to terms once she was in your clutches."

"You see that I know you well, Marco Fuentes, the outlaw ranchero."

"Again I ask you, who are you?" savagely said the prisoner.

"I am the man who saved the Senorita Lulita from you, the man who gave you the blow in your breast that knocked you from your horse."

"I am no more a padre than you are, Senor Fuentes," and the man laughed as he beheld in the dim light the intense surprise of the prisoner at his words.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### DENOUNCED.

THE Senor Samos was awakened from a sound sleep, by a voice calling outside of his door and telling him that a holy padre with the Senor Fuentes had just arrived and desired an audience with him.

He arose and quickly dressed, ordering his servants to show the visitor into the library.

There he joined them and discovered the Senor Fuentes with a face very pale and manner nervous in the extreme.

The padre he did not seem to know.

But the latter stepped forward quickly and said:

"Are we alone, senor?"

"We are, Senor Padre."

"I took the liberty of also sending a message to your daughter, Senor Samos, asking her to come here, and the servant who gave us entrance is a faithful one I believe I have heard you say, so that what is said will be a secret for the present."

"Certainly, padre, but what can cause this night visit to me and the calling up before dawn of my daughter?"

"As I see that you do not know me, Senor Samos, so I will introduce myself as your late guest the Senor Julius Marlowe, who assumed this disguise, which Senorita Samos obtained for me, to run to earth the man who sought to tear her from you, and gain your wealth by robbery."

The wonder of Senor Samos at this was great, and as Senorita Lulita Samos just then entered, explanations followed while Fuentes stood by in silence.

"I pray you explain the situation fully, Senor Marlowe," Senor Samos said.

"I can readily do so, senor."

"I decided to track out the band known as the Gold Ghouls, and the Senorita Lulita was my ally, for as will be shown later, she wished to keep from you the secret of who her kidnapper was."

"I went in my disguise to the ranch of Senor Fuentes and found him in bed suffering from a severe injury he had received."

"I pleaded ill, and in truth I am not yet recovered fully from the hardships I went through and injuries I received."

"I was received with hospitality, and given pleasant quarters, from which I at once began my plot to see just what Senor Fuentes was."

"He had concealed in his ranch a dozen men of his outlaw band."

"Outlaw band?"

"Yes, senor, of his outlaw band, for he expected an attack from you, if Senorita Lulita made known who her kidnappers were."

"He expected an attack from me?"

"Yes, Senor Samos, for I denounce this man Fuentes to you as the leader of the Gold Ghoul, and the man who attempted to deprive you of your daughter, and whom I struck from his horse with a stone."

"My God!"

"I denounce him, Senor Samos, as a card-sharp as well, and one who robbed you in playing with you, thus cheating you out of your fortune."

"He got you to give him your notes for your gambling debts to him—"

"Alas! this is too true."

"And he would have ruined you if you had refused to sacrifice your daughter by her hand in marriage to him."

"Villain! it is true, I can see your deviltry now; but alas! he holds my notes for nearly all I am worth in the world."

"He did hold them, but here they are, as I took them from his desk."

"They were gained by fraud, so are not legal and I give them to you, Senor Samos."

"Thank God!" and the ranchero eagerly seized them, glanced over them and said in a low tone:

"They are all here."

"I am saved!"

"To you, my dear senor, I owe it."

"I have done what I deemed only my duty, senor, to my host."

"He robbed me! he took my gold from my desk," cried Fuentes.

Marlo smiled and replied:

"The Senor Samos and his daughter will never believe that I can be shown to be a common thief, Fuentes."

"I took from you those notes, for you gained them by fraud, and more you are an outlaw, the leader of the band of Gold Ghoul."

"If the Senor Samos does right he will deliver you over to the cowboys on his ranch to be punished as you deserve, for the Senorita Lulita is here to say that you were her kidnapper."

"Is there no mistake about this, my child?"

"None, father, and he told me he was the Chief of the Gold Ghoul."

"And why did you not tell me of this, Lulita?"

"Because, my father, I knew the man held your notes for a large sum, and I feared that it would bring ruin upon you, while, if you sought to punish him, he would kill you."

"So I asked Senor Marlowe here, my preserver and yours, father, to keep the secret, and then it was that he set forth to discover all that he could to condemn Senor Fuentes."

"He has certainly done so, and it is now shown all that he is."

"I thank you from my heart, Senor Marlowe, and I leave the prisoner in your hands," said Senor Samos.

"Then, Senor Samos, I shall take him to those who will see that he does no more harm and will be punished for his crimes," was the remark of the young sailor who had denounced the ranchero as the outlaw chief which he in reality was.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### TO FACE THE GOLD GHOULS.

THE Senor Samos was deeply moved by all that had occurred.

He grasped the hand of the sailor, who, an outlaw himself and a fugitive from justice, was playing such a bold game against a fellow-criminal, and was more than profuse in his thanks.

He told Marlowe to take his prisoner in his keeping, to do with him as he deemed best.

"I will escort him to the camp of your cowboys, and see that they guard him to a place where he will do no harm."

"Then I will return to your ranch in time to accept your hospitality for breakfast, after

which, still playing the part of Padre Angelos, I have another duty to perform."

"I leave all in your hands, senor, and you have but to command my ranchmen to serve you as you deem best."

"Their camp, you know, is three miles from here, and I will expect you back to breakfast with us, for the Senorita Lulita and myself will be awaiting you."

"Thanks, senor."

"Now, Fuentes, I am ready."

Seeing that he was still to be left in the hands of the man who had so cleverly kidnapped him, Fuentes became greatly alarmed and appealed to the Senor Samos for mercy.

But the ranchero was deaf to his entreaties, and then he pleaded with Lulita.

But she coldly turned away with the remark, as she left the room:

"We will expect you at breakfast, Senor Marlowe."

"Come, Fuentes, I will stand no nonsense, so come with me."

The man uttered a malediction upon Senor Samos, his daughter and his captor, but was led out of the room, forced to mount his horse and the two rode away in the early dawn, taking the trail to the camp of the cowboys some miles away.

Just three hours after Senor Marlo returned, still in his garb as a padre.

Senor Samos met him at the Plaza entrance and gave him a warm welcome, conducting him himself to his room.

"Well, Senor Marlowe, you left the prisoner with my ranchmen?"

"Yes, Senor Samos."

"My daughter and I have been talking over the great crimes of that man and it has shocked us both greatly."

"Why, the authorities will hang him as soon as he is proven to be what you have shown him to be."

"Trials are expensive, Senor Samos, and the worst criminals often escape through some technicality of the law, while innocent men are punished."

"It is often true, senor, but he can never be cleared when tried."

"He will never be tried, senor."

"What?"

"I said no court would ever try him."

"Ah!"

"He has already been tried, senor."

"Your words have a strange meaning, senor."

"I will explain, Senor Samos, by saying that Fuentes was taken to the camp of your ranchmen."

"I called them together and told them just what he was guilty of."

"I then said that I would leave his punishment for them to decide upon and unanimously the verdict was that he should die."

"I asked him if he had any wishes he would like carried out, and he sold me his ranch, making me a bill of sale of it before the ranchmen as witnesses, and trusting me to pay the purchase money to one whom he named and gave the address of to me."

"I then bade him farewell, and left him with your ranchmen, two of whom were selected to start with him for the settlement, to deliver up to the authorities."

"Then—"

"His sentence was that he would never reach there, for the men who were his guards were to see to that."

"Ah! they will shoot him then?"

"No, hang him, for that was the sentence, senor."

"Well, all I can say is that he richly deserves his fate."

"But about his band, senor?"

"I will return to his ranch after breakfast, senor, or rather to my ranch."

"Not alone?"

"Oh, yes, for I have nothing to fear as I will still be Padre Angelos."

"Yes."

"I will acquaint the cowboys with the fate of their master and chief, and I believe they are innocent of any knowledge of what he was secretly."

"So I can leave them in charge of my ranch, as it now is, and I will try and discover if I can find out aught regarding the band of Gold Ghoul."

"Without their chief they will doubtless disperse."

"So I think, Senor Marlowe; but come, let us now go in to breakfast where the Senorita Lulita awaits us."

It was a tempting repast, and Senor Samos and Lulita did all in their power to entertain their welcome guest.

Toward noon he took his leave, and reaching the Fuentes ranch before nightfall found Juan anxiously awaiting his coming.

Escorted to the rooms of Senor Fuentes, by Juan, the new master made himself perfectly at home while awaiting the coming of the Gold Ghoul whom he had determined to boldly face to carry out his plot to the end.

#### CHAPTER XXV.

##### EL CINTO'S STORY.

THE pretended padre made himself perfectly at home in the hacienda which he had purchased upon a promise to pay to a person, the name and address of whom were given him by the outlaw chief.

Though the promise was made to a dying man, as it were, Marlo, the Cowboy Smuggler, as he is known to the reader, had not the remotest idea of keeping it.

He had the paper giving him the property, and it was a foothold for him he was glad to possess.

He would keep it, but pay nothing, for the owner was even then a dead man, so why should he, equally as great a rascal, pay good money for what was his by possession?

So the thought never came to him of doing what he would have termed so foolish a thing.

The man Juan was in a flurry of excitement over the return of the padre, for he still believed him to be what he represented himself.

What would the return mean to him, he asked himself and his wife a score of times that day.

When El Cinto came to Marlo with his supper he said very pleasantly:

"I wish to have a talk with you, El Cinto."

"Yes, Senor Padre."

"You are this man Juan's wife?"

"I am, senor."

"You do not love him?"

"Ah, senor!"

"I repeat it, you do not love the man."

"Why should a wife not love her husband, padre?"

"For various reasons; but it is true."

"Senor!"

"Is it not so?"

"I hate him!"

The words came savagely from the lips of the woman, and her eyes flashed with a malignant light.

"Why do you hate him?"

"Well, Senor Padre, I may as well tell you the truth."

"I am a Mexican and of a good family, too."

"Juan I did not know until I was twenty."

"As a girl of fourteen I loved a youth who was chief herder on my father's ranch, and he loved me."

"We vowed to be married some day, for though a herder, he was a truant from home and my equal in birth."

"But my father lost large sums of money in gambling, and he was well-nigh ruined."

"He would have been sold out but for one who killed his largest debtor, and obtained the papers he held of my father's."

"The other debtors he bought out, save one, whom he robbed of his wallet in which was the last mortgage held against my father.

"For this work he demanded my hand in marriage, and my father forced me to wed him, though I hated him.

"But the one I loved had disappeared most mysteriously, and I was led to believe he had deserted me.

"My husband had never seen him, but he told me that he had met him in Mexico, and that he was married.

"Misfortune followed my marriage, for my father died, my home was overburdened with debt, and I was left a pauper, while my husband suddenly took flight, carrying me with him.

"We were poor, and had to work for our living.

"One day, on this ranch, my old lover appeared before me.

"He told me that my husband had paid a man to put him out of the way.

"The man happened to be my lover's friend, and so took Juan's money and told him to go his way.

"I told him to seek service under Senor Fuentes, and he did so, soon becoming chief cowboy, for never having seen him, of course my husband did not know him.

"Here he has been a year, and we have both hoped that Juan would die, but he has not done so, for you know that he still lives."

"And this lover?" asked Marlo, who had listened with deep interest to the woman's story.

"Is Carlos, senor."

"Ah! a fine fellow indeed.

"Well, do not worry, for my idea is that Juan will not live long," said the padre in a tone so significant that the woman could not but understand its meaning, for she said:

"Remember, senor, he married me under false pretenses of serving my father.

"I now know that he killed my father, and he tried to do away with Carlos, while he has treated me in a most brutal manner.

"Do you wonder now, senor, that I hate him?"

"I do not, and to-morrow I will talk with you more, you and Carlos."

The woman bowed and disappeared, and having finished his supper, Marlo began a tour of inspection of that wing of the hacienda.

He tried the secret turn-door and found that he could work it.

It let him into a corridor from which stone steps led up to a room which was back of the old chapel.

The room was so situated in the angle of walls that no one would ever suspect its being there, while there were no windows in the sides, all light and air coming from the roof.

The room was large enough to accommodate thirty men, there were bunks around the walls, several tables and some benches, that was all.

The door that opened into the room was of iron, and heavily barred on the corridor side.

"This is a prison from which no man could escape," muttered Marlo as he retraced his way to his room, to await the coming of the outlaws.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE CHANGE OF CHIEFS.

WHEN Carlos the cowboy arrived after nightfall he was accompanied by the full band of outlaws, fourteen in number, under their lieutenants, Sanchez and Antonio.

They had come, according to orders, ready to give up the retreat forever, a hint having been thrown out by the padre for

Carlos to tell them that the retreat was known and would have to be given up.

The outlaws were met by Juan and told that the master was away, and wished them to take up their quarters in the secret chamber again, where they would remain until they heard from him.

They went at once to their retreat in the hacienda, and Carlos awaited to see the padre.

He was soon joined by Marlo who said:

"You have done well, Carlos.

"Did all come?"

"Yes, senor."

"The retreat was deserted then?"

"It was, padre."

"Well, go and seek rest, for to-morrow I wish to see you upon a most important matter; but I desire that you get first two fresh horses each for these men and send them here at once."

"I will, padre."

"You can go now."

Carlos disappeared and a moment after Juan came.

"You saw the men to the secret chamber?"

"I did, good father."

"You are going after their supper?"

"Yes, father, my wife has it all ready for me to fetch to them."

"See here, Juan."

"Yes, father."

"As we may have to leave here suddenly, for you will go with me, if you have any valuables or gold, you had better bring it and place it with your master's and mine!"

"I will, Senor Padre."

Juan then departed but in a quarter of an hour he was back again bearing with him a large basket of food and a buckskin bag.

This he handed to Marlo with the remark: "Senor Padre, here is all my worldly wealth, for you to keep for me."

"It will be safe," said Marlo and he added:

"We will look over it together, so there will be no mistake."

He poured the contents of the bag out upon the table.

There was quite a sum in gold, a few gems in a small box, some jewelry and half a dozen trinkets of more or less value.

"Quite a sum total, Juan, worth fully a couple of thousand," said the pleased Marlo.

"All of that, senor."

"Now take the supper to the men and say that Padre Angelos will come soon to see them in place of the chief."

"I will, padre."

"And then you get your horse, provisions for the band for several days' travel, and come here, for I wish you to guide the men to a certain place I will direct you to."

"Yes, Senor Padre, and you?"

"Will await your return here, Juan."

"Yes, senor."

So Juan went on to the secret chamber, and when he returned went off to get his horse.

The padre made his way, light in hand, to the secret chamber and suddenly appeared before the men.

"Men, I have but a few words to say to you, and it will be to the point.

"I came here to try and save your chief, and came in this disguise, for I am no priest.

"Your chief is an old friend of mine, and so I sought to serve him, and to get him to go with me to where there is much more gold to be made than here.

"I wished him to take you, his faithful men with him.

"But I was too late to save him, for he was captured to-day and hanged."

A start among the men, whose faces paled, showed how they were alarmed at this news.

"I would have shared his fate but for this priestly garb.

"Your retreat to-night is in the hands

of your foes, and had I not sent for you, then your fate would have been the same as your chief's.

"I am, like yourselves, an outlaw, but without a band, and you have no chief, so I offer to take you with me to where we can work together, a country I know well and where we can make gold in plenty.

"We have not long to delay, so I wish you to answer quickly what you will do.

"Will you follow me, or will you go your separate ways, and take your chances?"

"We will follow you, senor," came in the voice of each man.

"I am glad to hear this; but now I have a duty for you to perform."

"Name it, senor."

"Well, I know the traitor who caused your chief to be hanged, and sought to bring the same fate upon you.

"He was trusted by Senor Fuentes, and little suspects that I know his guilt.

"I just sent him for his horse, and for food for you all for a couple of days' ride.

"When he returns he is, as I will tell him, to guide you to a certain point several miles from here.

"Once there you are to hang him, and there I will join you in a short while after."

"We will hang him, Senor Chief."

"Well, men, I am glad to feel that I have those under my lead whom I can trust.

"Now let me tell of a man who is a traitor to you all."

"Yes, senor."

"It is Juan."

"Juan shall die," came in a chorus of voices.

"Now follow me and bring all your belongings.

"We must not have dawn find us near here."

The men followed their new leader, and at the door Juan awaited with a horse well laden with food and his own animal standing near.

"Juan, guide these men to the crossing of the trails, two miles from here, and there await my coming."

"Yes, senor," and the unsuspecting man mounted and rode away at the head of the outlaw band.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### ON THE NORTHERN TRAIL.

It was with a strange expression upon his face that Marlo watched the outlaws ride away from the hacienda, led by Juan, whom he had decided to get rid of.

He doubted the man, and he wanted his money, while he hoped to make faithful friends of Carlos and El Cinto by the fate he had determined Juan should meet.

He gathered his traps together, and what he wished to carry with him of the belongings of Fuentes, and put them ready by the door.

The poor fool is dead by this time so I will seek El Cinto and let her call Carlos, for they shall know what has happened."

He walked to the room of El Cinto across the Plaza and called to her.

"Yes, senor, how can I serve the padre?"

"I am going away, El Cinto, and I wish to have a talk with you and Carlos."

"Yes, senor."

"Call Carlos to come here, and you accompany me, for I intend to serve both of you well."

"Yes, senor, but Juan—"

"Juan will never cross your path again, good woman."

"Senor!"

"I mean it."

"I do not understand, senor."

"Juan is dead."

"Dead!"

"Yes."

"Oh, Senor Padre!"

"It is the truth."  
 "When did he die, senor?"  
 "About five minutes ago, I take it."  
 "He was killed?"  
 "He was hanged."  
 "Oh, senor."  
 "He was about to turn traitor, as I have reason to know, so I turned him over to the band to hang."

"Can it be true?"  
 "Will you believe the testimony of Carlos?"

"Yes, Senor Padre."  
 "Then bid Carlos come to me, and he shall escort me on my way to where he will find the body of Juan hanging to a tree."

"Ah, senor, he was a bad, a very bad man, but this was so sudden."

"Yes, rather; but go after Carlos."

She walked rapidly away in the darkness and the padre awaited for some minutes, when she returned, accompanied by Carlos.

"Carlos, I wish to say to you that I hold the deed for this property purchased from Chief Fuentes before his death, for he was hanged this morning at dawn by Vigilantes."

"That was why I sent you after the men, for they can be saved."

"Juan is also dead, hanged by the men tonight, as he intended turning traitor."

"Juan, senor?"

"Yes, Carlos, and that makes El Cinto here a widow."

"Now I intend to leave you in full charge of the ranch, and El Cinto will look after the hacienda."

"I know your story, for she has told me of it, and your foe, and hers, is dead, so my advice is that you make her your wife some day after she thinks she has mourned sufficiently long for poor Juan."

"You have, I believe, Carlos, two herders to aid you, so I leave you in full management, and you can expect me to visit you from time to time."

"Yes, senor."

"Now get me the best horse that is on the place, and mount your own horse and come with me, for I wish you to see Juan hanging to a tree that you may vouch for it to El Cinto."

"I will go, senor," said the man, and his face showed that he was delighted with the prospect of wedding El Cinto, his first and only sweetheart, and in the expectation of finding Juan, his hated rival and foe, dead at the hands of the Gold Ghouls.

The man soon returned with the horses, and using one for a pack-animal the pretended padre put upon him all that he cared to carry with him from the hacienda, for he intended to make himself as comfortable as possible in the life he intended to lead.

Both El Cinto and Carlos were as happy as could be under the prospect before them and they thanked the new owner of the ranch over and over again for their kindness to them.

At last the chief was ready, and bidding El Cinto farewell he said to her:

"Remember, this hacienda is now the property of Senor Marlowe, who purchased it, and Fuentes has been hanged as an outlaw and his band scattered."

"You and Carlos are left in charge, and I will return from time to time and look to my interest here."

"Adios!"

With this he rode away with Carlos.

They took the trail leading to the spot which Marlo had appointed as a rendezvous with the men.

As they approached the spot they beheld the men grouped together and saw swinging from a limb the form of Juan.

"He died hard, senor chief," said Sanchez.

"He vowed he was no traitor, and when he saw that he appealed in vain for mercy he fought like a tiger."

"But we obeyed your orders and hung him up."

"You did right, Sanchez."

"Is he dead?"

"Some time ago, chief."

"All right, Carlos will come in the morning and bury him."

"Now we start on a long trail to the northward."

Carlos saw them ride away and then went back to El Cinto with the news that she was really a widow.

And on the trail northward they came to a place the next day where a rope hung to a tree and beneath it was a newly-made grave.

On the head-board was cut in with a knife the words:

FUENTES,

CHIEF OF THE GOLD GHOULS.

*Hanged for his crimes.*

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### HELD UP ON THE TRAIL.

BACK to the strange people whose home was on the rugged shores of Point Desolation, I will carry my readers, though not this time to the scenes on the coast, but to the wild mountains where their inland abodes were situated.

It will be remembered that Captain Karl Kenton had decided to go with his family to the mountains, after their return from the chase of the Sea Pearl, and there remain until the new craft Sea Pearl was built.

The more he thought of going into the world which so long had regarded him as guilty of crime, the more he shrunk from it.

True, Captain Edgar Yerger would, with the proofs of his innocence in his possession, clear the name of Kent Carleton from all stain; but he loved the wild, free life he had led at Point Desolation and in the mountains, and was full of regret at giving it up.

But for his wife, and the daughter who was budding into maidenhood, he would never have relinquished it.

But they were to be considered above all else, and so as a compromise he had said to his wife:

"Valerie, we will build the new craft and remain here for a year longer."

"By that time the story of my innocence of the crimes I was charged with will be almost forgotten, and we will go again into the world, and bring Pearl out as a young lady, while we will see to it that Ralph goes into the army for navy, for which he is so well fitted."

"Now we will go to the mountains for a few months."

Mrs. Carleton was always ready to agree to what her husband deemed best, and, besides, she too had shrunk from appearing again in brilliant social life, so she was more than willing to still remain in the humble home among the coasters, and said:

"Yes, Edgar can see about an appointment for Ralph, and a couple of years at school will fit Pearl for the life she will have to lead, for already she is well advanced in her studies."

So it was arranged and while Ralph went up to San Francisco to see about a new craft, to replace the Sea Pearl, the captain of the coasters went with his wife and daughter up to their mountain home.

Ralph carried letters from Mrs. Carleton to her brother, Captain Yerger of the cutter, urging him to seek an appointment in the navy for the youth, and to aid him in selecting a vessel suitable for what she was intended for, or failing to find such a craft, to show him where he could have one built, for it was Captain Karl's intention to present her to the coasters when he should leave them.

After a two weeks' stay in San Francisco, in which he was treated with every kindness by Captain Yerger, who was really proud of the handsome young coaster, Ralph the Runaway returned to the Point in the Idle Wings, the craft he had gone up to the city in.

He passed the night in the chief's cabin and the next day mounted a horse, and with a couple of other animals bearing packs, of his purchases in Frisco, started alone for the mountains.

He would have to go very slow, on account of his pack-horses, but hoped to reach the mountain cabin of the coaster chief before sunset, for he had heard that the trails were infested with road-agents of late, a bold and desperate band of outlaws having appeared in that part of the country within the past few weeks, and who were known as the Gold Ghouls of the Coast.

Ralph had been warned that he had better take a strong guard with him, and a number of the young sailors had volunteered to accompany him, but he had politely declined their assistance and started alone.

Those of the coasters who had ranches in the mountains, had pitched their cabins along the summit of a ridge, and they thus extended for a distance of a score of miles.

There was one large cabin built for those who had not homes there, and the valleys and plains were dotted with cattle, herded by cowboys who remained all the year around.

The home of the chief was a four-room cabin, strongly built, with vegetable garden near, and situated upon a commanding point among a clump of pines.

The view was grand in every direction and the cabin was surrounded by a broad piazza.

Hammocks were hung among the trees for an afternoon siesta, there were rides in every direction and walks, wild flowers were abundant and the place was indeed a charming retreat.

A number of other families had gone to their mountain homes so that there was no need of being lonesome.

It was to this retreat, which Pearl had named "Sky Parlor," that Ralph was making his way with his pack-horses, when suddenly he was brought to a halt by the command:

"Hands up, pard!"

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A FAVOR REMEMBERED.

THE sudden challenge falling upon Ralph's ears fairly startled him, for riding slowly along, the sultry afternoon had caused him to drop off to sleep in his saddle.

He saw a man over the top of a boulder with a rifle leveled at his breast, and he felt that he was at the mercy of the one who so sternly ordered him to halt.

So he obeyed, drawing rein quickly, but watching his chance to act.

"No funny business, pard, for I hain't alone, as I has a dozen good men within call."

"Hands up!"

The youth obeyed, and the man scrambling over the rock, still keeping his weapon leveled, approached the youth.

"Why, Tony, is it you, and turned road-agent?" cried Ralph.

"Lordy! it is you, Master Ralph," said the man at once lowering his weapon.

"Yes, Tony, but I did not know that you had become an outlaw."

"See here, Master Ralph, it's just what I am, and I don't like the business, and I am not the man to turn a gun on you or to rob you; but I never expected to see you here."

"Why I live back on the coast, Tony, and up in the mountains too, and am now going

my home, for I thought you knew I was one of the Point Desolation coasters."

"I do remember now you said so, sir, when you saved me from being killed that night in Frisco."

"I did kill the man, Master Ralph, though I said I didn't, and his comrades intended to cut me to pieces for it, and would have done so had you not come up and saved me."

"I hav'n't forgotten it, sir, nor that you gave me some money and landed me at a place on the coast where I was safe."

"Well, sir, all went hard with me and at last I turned road-agent and joined a band of outlaws far to the South of here, whom they called the Gold Ghouls."

"Our chief was killed and we got another who made himself master over us and brought us up here to rob coaches and ranches."

"He said he was a coaster from Point Desolation and could enrich us."

"Because he had fought a duel with his rival, and tried to make a little gold by smuggling they had turned him out and then chased him down."

"His craft was struck by lightning and all on board save himself were killed; but he escaped, got to a ranch and met an old friend in our chief, who got hanged."

"Then the new chief, Marlo, he calls himself, brought us up here and we have not done much in money-making, I can tell you."

"I was put here to-day to halt any traveler coming along and rob him, and you are the first I have met, and never would I harm you, Master Ralph."

Ralph listened most attentively to the man and then gave a low whistle.

Then he said:

"Tony, I'll tell you all about this man Marlo, and then I know I can see that you have a position among the coasters, for no one need know what you have been."

"As for Marlo he is the vilest of the vile as you shall hear."

Then Ralph told the story of Marlo's wicked deeds, his attempt to kill him, his treachery, smuggling and escape, with the pursuit that followed and the belief that Marlo and all on the Sea Pearl had been lost.

"So you are the son of the Coaster Chief, Master Ralph?"

"His adopted son, Tony."

"And his daughter is the Sea Pearl?"

"Yes."

"Well! well! and you say I can become a coaster?"

"Yes, Tony."

"I thank Heaven I met you, Master Ralph, for to-morrow night the chief arranged to raid the home of Captain Karl, killing all there except the daughter, Pearl, and carry her off."

"He spoke of another, one Ralph the chief's son, whom he was to capture and torture to death."

"Master Ralph?"

"Yes, Tony."

"Go on to your home, and prepare for to-morrow night."

"All of the mountain houses are to be raided, but Chief Karl's is to be the first struck."

"Get your men then to ambush the Gold Ghouls and don't spare one of them."

"I will start with them, but I'll drop out as we near the place."

"Then, the next morning you can meet me here and I will go with you where you please."

Ralph extended his hand and grasped that of the man who was so nobly returning the service he had once done him.

"Tony, I trust you wholly, and I will do just as you say."

"To-morrow night we will be ready for the band."

"How many are there of them?"

"Fifteen of us with the chief, but I won't be there."

"Well, I will meet you here the day following, if I am not killed I will be here to meet you."

"Should harm befall me then Pearl will come, and you will find a warm friend in her, for I will tell her all."

"I'll be here, Master Ralph, and be sure and be ready for the Gold Ghouls, and have a surprise for them, as they are not easily beaten off."

"I will be ready, Tony," and again grasping the man's hand, Ralph rode on his way with the muttered words:

"Now, Marlo, I will have my revenge, and you richly deserve death for this vile plot alone."

## CHAPTER XXX.

### RALPH'S REVENGE.

THE sun set the following day with the Coaster Chief and his family seated upon their piazza enjoying the beauty of the scene.

There was a visitor there also, and Ralph sat not far away from Pearl.

It was the night of the expected attack of the Gold Ghouls, and yet there appeared to be no arrangement made to meet them.

Did they doubt the story told Ralph by Tony?

Could it be that they were indifferent to the danger that threatened them?

As darkness came on a man on foot approached the cabin.

Soon after, another came, and another, a fourth, fifth, and so on until a score of men had quickly slipped into the cabin, and all of them were armed.

Soon after others began to arrive, all on foot, until a dozen more had come.

These were divided in two parties, and placed in hiding at different points in the pines, among the rocks.

Then a third party of half a dozen came from the cabin and took up position at another point of vantage.

The others remained in the house.

Back of the cabin a couple of hundred yards was a steep cliff, and it looked sheer down several hundred feet into a foaming torrent that swept around its base.

The position of the parties in concealment about the cabin was such that they could drive the attacking force toward the cliffs and there force them to surrender or rush them over to their fate.

Thus passed a couple of hours and then a horseman came riding up the mountain trail.

Behind him a couple of hundred yards came others, but the hoofs of their horses were muffled so as to prevent any sound.

The horseman rode up to the door and called.

An answer came from within and he begged shelter for the night.

"All right, I will be out soon," cried the voice within.

The horseman dismounted and stood by the door, revolver in hand, while the others, thirteen in number, came slowly and noiselessly up to the piazza.

"Why do you not let me in?" cried the horseman impatiently.

"Because it would not be safe to do so."

"Seek shelter elsewhere."

"Come, men, in with this door," shouted the horseman.

Hardly had the words left his lips when there came a volley of shots from the windows, and several men fell from their saddles.

Then shouts were heard, flashes of rifles from among the pines, and men rushed toward the scene.

"We are entrapped!"

"Save yourselves, men!" cried a voice, and the Gold Ghouls made a dash to retreat the way they had come.

But volleys of rifle-shots headed them off and they turned in terror and fled toward the cliffs.

Not a man seemed to know the cliffs were there, for the pines grew to the very edge, and only as cries of horror came from those going over did those in the rear try to draw rein.

It was useless, for their horses were beyond control, and in a mass those of the outlaws who had not fallen under the fire of the defenders of the Coaster Chief's cabin, went to their doom over the cliffs.

Then men stood about in groups, after the short, sharp conflict, and the day came on leaden wings it seemed.

Several of the defenders had been killed, a few more wounded, but the band of Gold Ghouls had been wiped out by Dead Shot Ralph, and that took from the deep sorrow at the loss of kindred and friends.

Early in the morning Ralph mounted his horse and rode away alone.

He sought the place where he was to meet Tony and there found him.

"I heard it all, Master Ralph, so all must have gone."

"How many men came?"

"Fourteen."

"There are six dead bodies near the cabin, and I counted eight horses and riders go over the cliff."

"Then all have been wiped out; but did you find the chief's body?"

"No, he went over the cliff, and I have my revenge," said Ralph, sternly.

Then he turned to his companion and said:

"Come with me, Tony, and all except the chief, his wife and Pearl shall believe the story I told, that you had escaped from the Ghouls and meeting me told me of the attack."

And so Ralph went on toward the cabin with the man whose warning had saved so much of misery and death along the mountain range.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### CONCLUSION.

TONY found himself most cordially welcomed by the Coaster Chief and his people, and told a simple story of having been captured, and making his escape was coming to warn Captain Karl of his danger when he met Ralph on the trail.

He was at once welcomed as one of the coasters, and every kindness was showered upon him.

The dead outlaws were buried down the valley, while the fallen coasters were placed in the burying-ground of their people upon the mountains.

Tony led a party to the retreat of the outlaws, and there much booty and many horses were obtained.

The Coaster Chief decided that it was best to make a report of the affair to Captain Yerger and so Ralph and Tony were sent several days after up to Frisco in the Idle Wings, and the cutter's commander was told the whole story.

In the absence of Ralph, Captain Yerger had heard of a pretty little craft that could be bought cheap, so he stopped the architect on the plans for a vessel and purchased her for Captain Karl.

Putting half of his crew on board the new vessel, which Ralph at once named the Pearl of the Sea, the young skipper sailed her back to Point Desolation harbor and in the run there found that she distanced the Idle Wings easily.

Returning to their home on the coast, Captain Karl, his wife and Pearl, remained there for a long while before going once more into the busy world they had so long been separated from, and when they did it did not take Pearl long to become a reigning belle in society.

Ralph received his appointment to the navy, for "services rendered," and though he afterward discovered that he was heir to a title and estates in England he preferred to be an American and so remained an officer of the United States service, and was repaid in the end by winning the beautiful Pearl of the Sea for his bride.

Duty having called Captain Yerger down the coast and inland, he met there Lulita Samos, fell in love with her and in time won her heart, which had very nearly broken under the knowledge that "Julius Marlowe," was none other than Marlo the Cowboy Smuggler, for she had learned to devotedly love the worthless scamp; but then it is truly said that:

"Woman's love will, too often,  
Like the ivy, cling  
Around a base and worthless thing."

THE END.

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